RICE UNIVERSITY

THE WORLD AND THE WORD IN MERLEAU-PONTY

Towards an existential epistemology and an ontology of the human body

by

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"If science is not to degenerate into
a medley of ad hoc hypotheses, it must
become philosophical and must enter upon
a thorough criticism of its own foundations."
Alfred North Whitehead

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

THESIS: Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre makes it possible to speak of man's perception and speech in a way that avoids: a) the mentalism that often characterizes discussions of these matters oriented by non-empiricist philosophies, b) the physicalism that often characterizes discussions of these same topics oriented by empiricist philosophies.

Avant propos

The following considerations may help to bring out what is at issue in our talk of mentalism and physicalism. The Aristotelian tradition is, I think, justly credited with having argued for the ontological unity of body and soul. Aristotle says, for example, that ". . . in every thing the essence is identified with the ground of its being, and in the case of living things their being is to live."[1] He says that it is more correct to assert that the person speaks, than that the soul speaks through the instrumentality of the body. Elsewhere he argues that to say that the soul is angry is like saying that the soul weaves or builds houses.[2] Such assertions seem to avoid any sort of dualism. However, Aristotle reserves some doubt as to whether involvement of the body is absolutely necessary for thought. Moreover, he makes many

statements which sound decidedly dualistic. "Voice then is the impact of the inbreathed air against the windpipe, and the agent that produces the impact is the soul resident in these parts of the body."[3] This might be brought in line with his basic non-dualistic position by pointing out that "voice" (phone) is what linguists call phonemes, and that they are produced by the living body qua body and not qua living being, and that it is only voice with meaning (phone semantike) which is produced by the body qua living being. But then is it correct to say that ". . . the agent that produces the impact [of voice] is the soul?" Furthermore Aristotle attributes three senses of "cause" to the soul with respect to the body. The soul is not only the essence of the living body, but its end, and the source or origin of movement.[4] To assert the last has the earmarks of dualism.

Philosophies that deal with the problems presumably involved here can be roughly divided into the following classes. (1) Those that maintain some sort of straightforward dualism (Descartes). (2) Those that swallow the "corporeal" factor up into mind (idealism generally and Berkeley perhaps most consistently). (3) Those that dissolve "mind" into a process no different essentially than other "physical" processes. (4) Those that attempt to maintain an always precarious balance between dualism and the other two positions. The Aristotelian and Hegelian tradition lie within this fourth

class, as does Merleau-Ponty in his somewhat unique manner.

The terms "mentalism" and "physicalism" which are used in the statement of my thesis are clearly ontological. This might appear to be taking undue liberties with Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre, for he outlines his position as at equal distances, so to speak, from rationalism (which he calls intellectualism) and empiricism, which are epistemological and not ontological positions per se. The justification for taking this "liberty" is twofold: first, Merleau-Ponty is attempting to sketch out an ontology of man in Phenomenology of Perception;[5] second, his epistemology clearly implies and frequently states explicitly something about the nature of the entity that does the knowing and is to that extent ontology.[6]

It is not claimed that the doctrine of the corps propre is the only way to treat perception and speech even should one wish to make ontological assertions concerning them. It is, however, one way. Finally, this dissertation does not pretend to offer a conclusive proof of the "thesis" but to marshal some persuasive arguments in its behalf.

The Starting Point

The criteria by which theories are evaluated are not imposed by the facts. They are for the most part only tacitly adhered to by the working scientist, and are exemplified by the manner scientists on the planet earth actually proceed.

Strictly speaking the de facto criteria by which theories are evaluated are personally acquired habits which are to a great extent held in check by practical considerations and even by moral pressures (e.g., fear of ridicule) exerted by the scientific community to which the individual belongs.

One of the principal tasks of the philosopher of science has been to make these criteria explicit and to establish, if possible, their de jure character. But, in doing so, he is on the horns of a dilemma. In effect he needs metacriteria by which to determine which criteria are required, as opposed to those that are actually used. The danger always remains that he may curb the freedom of investigation by drawing the criteria too restrictively and prescribing what will count as criteria. If his task were in no sense normative, then the philosopher of science would simply describe the actual employment of tacit criteria. He would then become a historian of scientific method, or more specifically a chronicler of scientific method. The philosopher of science solves this dilemma by metacriteria. For example, one metacriterion for evaluating the criteria by which theories are to be evaluated might be whether they contribute to the aims of scientists. It could be argued that it is futile to ask the next question: what criterion should be used in evaluating whether that metacriterion or other metacriteria should be used? To avoid an infinite regress, others may say that the aim of scientists is

to achieve the truth about facts or that they wish to understand phenomena. But was this not precisely what was at issue? The first level criteria were already an attempt to answer the same question in a different form, namely "What will count as a valid theory?"

A more forthright reply made by many philosophers of science to the infinite regress in metatheories is that to have "scientific understanding" is precisely to possess the cognitive equipment by which prediction and control can be exercised on phenomena in a consistent and elegant manner. Such a position is taken by some quantum physicists who do not purport to explain phenomena, but simply to deal successfully with them.[7] The scientist qua scientist is not concerned with "reality" or with "understanding" in some perhaps more radical philosophic sense.

This is, I believe, a sufficient epistemology for the physical scientist. It has the consequence, however, that only what will submit to the methodology of science can be taken as a fit object of scientific inquiry. But is this not unduly restrictive, not only for the psychologist, the linguist, but for anyone who wishes to deal with the "human sciences?" Is this not particularly so when the final criterion for judging whether phenomena can be dealt with successfully is whether they submit to prediction and control and are susceptible of mathematical handling?

The philosopher at least is entitled in principle to

reject as the aim of his inquiry to be able to "deal successfully" with phenomena in that sense. Philosophy as a human act is also a phenomenon. And if the philosopher of science as such were himself an object of science how could he evaluate science? The philosopher of science then does not undertake the most radical inquiry into understanding. A more radical question could be "what makes it possible to deal successfully with phenomena?" Or one could ask "what is understanding in general, not merely what is scientific understanding, and how is it possible." In a word epistemology in something like the traditional sense is philosophically antecedent to a philosophy of science.

Finally if philosophical speech escapes the strictures of the "scientific method" why should not other forms of speech escape it as well? And since speech is merely one of the many modes of human comportment, why should other forms of human comportment[8] be subject to the "scientific method."

In his major works Merleau-Ponty is deeply concerned with epistemological problems in the traditional sense. He was convinced that the contemporary scientific psychology could assist him in this concern, which he expresses as the effort "to understand the relations of consciousness to nature." He considered it his first task to consider the grounds for various claims about perception and comportment made in what were then current theories, and to develop his

own philosophical ideas out of the conflict of claims. His starting point then is his own wit and genius attempting to achieve philosophical insight into the very meaning of perception and comportment against the background of what he considered the impasses of his predecessors.

The Doctrine of the Corps propre

It may help to forestall some misunderstandings if I outline what I take to be Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre.

Comportment.

In the opening lines of his first major work The Structure of Behavior,[9] Merleau-Ponty says that his goal is to understand the relations of consciousness to nature.[10] Nature is taken to stand for a multiplicity of events external to each other and bound together by relations of causality. He reminds the reader that critical thought, abandoning ontological pretensions, had given a new sense to the meaning of nature than the one he referred to in his opening lines. Physics, he says, seems to justify this philosophy at least de facto. Physics uses mechanical, dynamic, and even psychological models and is relatively indifferent to the classical antinomies such as how change or motion are possible or whether there can be action at a distance, etc. The situation in biology is somewhat different, and there is still some interest in the classical opposition between mechanism and vitalism.

In psychology there is widespread disagreement even as to what the psychologist is studying. Merleau-Ponty believes that neither the empirically oriented psychologies, nor the intellectualistically oriented psychologies give a philosophically satisfactory account of perception or comportment. "Empiricism" here means the philosophical attitude which lies behind the attempt to understand perception and the actions of animals and men as the net result of more elemental functions. "Intellectualism" stands for the philosophical attitude which lies behind the attempt to understand perception as "confused" acts of cognition and judgment.

He proposes to seek a middle ground between empiricism and intellectualism. By beginning with comportment, which of itself is neutral to the "mental" and the "psychological", he believes it will be possible to define both the mental and the psychological anew. (SC 2, SB 4) He is convinced that what is healthy and profound in behaviorism, i.e., that man is a "constant debate with the physical and social world," is compromised by an impoverished philosophy. (SC 2 footnote 1, SB 4 footnote 1).

It is then crucial to an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's first major work to realize that his aim is not to establish a scientific methodology for behaviorism. He is, rather, seeking to develop a philosophy of human existence which does not implicitly or explicitly return to empiricism or intellectualism.

I think it may be said, however, that something analogous to a "scientific" hypothesis guides his inquiry. It may be expressed in the following way: if perception and comportment are intrinsically "intentional" (that is, if they are meaning-giving "events"), then an uncritical use of the basic concepts such as stimulus, response, variable, etc., in psychology will often involve equivocation.

On the other hand, if perception and comportment are not explicit meaning-giving acts or the "effects" of such acts, then a straightforward application of other psychological concepts such as motive, meaning, etc., will also involve equivocation.

Merleau-Ponty believes that both contrasting views arise out of and return to the philosophical impasses of parallelism, interactionism, epiphenomenalism. But if the fundamental notions that he recommends are not physical or psychological, what are they? His reply is that they are "existential." Philosophical problems of human existence he believes cannot be satisfactorily approached from the body or from the mind. For him body and mind are abstract limiting notions of a single entity he calls the corps propre (one's own body), which is neither merely an objective process nor, of course, mind pure and simple.

The notion of the corps propre is admittedly a paradoxical one, but even a prosaic example will illustrate it. A carpenter pounding a nail does not "think about" the hammer

or nail (if he did he would probably mash his finger); but his action is not "purely automatic" (if it were he would not make "reasonable" adjustments to the slightest change in the situation).

The doctrine of the corps propre is particularly paradoxical for one who prefers to think in terms of elemental process and causes, as opposed to what Merleau-Ponty calls thinking in terms of "structure." Gestalt psychology has made us quite familiar with a type of "structure" thinking.[11] The Gestalt is not a sum of its "components," but it is not more than its components. The efficacy of the "parts" of a Gestalt have entirely different properties taken separately, than they do taken in context of the Gestalt. For particulate and causal thinking it is paradoxical that subjects trained by shock conditioning to raise their hands only at the sound of a specific tone will not respond at all when this note appears fourteen times in the course of listening to "Home Sweet Home."[12] For the Gestalt psychologist this is exactly what one would expect, and it would be paradoxical if things happened otherwise.

In the first half of SC Merleau-Ponty attempts to show that scientific psychology has not made a sufficiently radical examination of basic notions such as stimulus, response, descrimination, behavior and even Gestalt. This does not mean that these sciences have not achieved great insight into their subject matter. Quite the contrary, it is because they have

achieved profound insight that a philosophical analysis of their achievements, Merleau-Ponty believes, may enable him to construct his own position, which is further developed in the second half of SC. In the first half of SC he attempts to show that what reflexology and behaviorism have discovered suggests that "structural" thinking should replace "Particulate" thinking. In the second half he attempts to show that since comportment is neither a net result of elemental functions nor a function of ideas and judgments, it should be conceived of as a "dialectic structure" or more explicitly as a meaning-giving process characterized by Gestalt properties.

Perception and Meaning.

In the Phenomenology of Perception published three years after SC (in 1945), Merleau-Ponty gives added support to the views expressed in SC. Though he still uses the method of contrasting opposing scientific psychological theories and developing his own philosophical position out of the clash, he is now more concerned to show the philosophical implications of his emerging doctrine of the corps propre.

Before writing the Phenomenology of Perception or, apparently, even the Structure of Behavior, Merleau-Ponty had learned from Husserl not to consider perception so much an event in the world as the very origin of the world. The justification for the use of the term "world" in this manner has a long and perplexing history. Basically, however, it is

quite simple. To say that the "world" is that toward which one is turned in experience, and that perception "constitutes" this world, is a way of expressing the insight that the world taken in itself and without reference to an observer can only be referred to in a negative or oblique manner. One might call it the unrepresented, for example. Merleau-Ponty designates it picturesquely as "etre sauvage" (brute being).

Merleau-Ponty points out that Kant had shown in the Critique of Pure Reason that the world as a collection of connected phenomena is anticipated in the consciousness of my unity, and is the means whereby I come into being as a consciousness, and that there can be therefore no object except for a subject. For Merleau-Ponty what distinguishes Husserl's "intentionality" from Kant's is that the unity of the world before being posited by cognition in an act of identifying an object or event, is lived as already made. It is this pre-objective world which decrees what knowledge shall take as its object. This, Merleau-Ponty says, is why Husserl distinguishes an intentionality of act (which is that of our judgments and reflective acts) from an operant intentionality,[13] which produces the natural unity of the world prior to any reflection on that world. (PP xiii, PP xviii)

But Merleau-Ponty goes much further than merely adhering to the notion of operant intentionality as the constitution of the world prior to reflection.

First of all he disagrees at least with the earlier Husserl who conceived the noetic activity as a bestowal of meaning on hyletic data.[14] When we learn from Gestalt theory that a figure on a background is the simplest "sense-datum" available to us, we must recognize, Merleau-Ponty contends, that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception allowing us to bring in the notion of "impressions" and a "synthetic act" in an analytic, scientific or ideal analysis. "It (the Gestalt) is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be a perception at all." (PP 10, PP4) Perception is that by which there are represented units, that whereby there are images and meanings, and hence that whereby there are "elements" which can be "associated." Hence to say that perception "synthesizes" elemental units, or bestows meaning on something prior is conjecture founded on an acquisition made possible by perception.

Secondly, Merleau-Ponty extends the notion of operant intentionality not only to the constitution of the world in perception, but also to behavior (motor intentionality). Behavior too is considered to be the very emergency of meaning-giving acts[15] and is not the bestowal of meaning on anything more fundamental or prior.

We may now say something more precise about the corps propre. Merleau-Ponty does not wish to say that perception

arises in virtue of a constituting activity on the part of the mind or of the body. It cannot be in virtue of the body we see (even our own) for as a representation it is one of the achievements of that constituting activity. Is it then the mind that perceives, and is perception then the thought of something? This is equally unacceptable to him. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty requires another notion of the body, which is not a representation or an image or coenesthesia, nor an object of consciousness, but the condition for the possibility of perception of the world as well as of our own body. This is the corps propre that each of us is. Why then call it a body at all? Most likely because there is no other name for it, though some of its functions have been ascribed to the transcendental unity of apperception (Kant), to the soul, and even to the body as physical organism.

What reply can be given to the questions, "what percieves, what experiences, what knows?" If we say that it is the unrepresented body as a physical system we are involved in the predicament that such a physical system represents itself to itself in virtue of its own act--that the unrepresented makes itself represented in virtue of its own power. If we say that it is the mind or soul that perceives, experiences and knows, we in effect return to a mind-body dualism. In the notion of the corps propre (which he calls an existential notion) Merleau-Ponty believes he has found a mediating notion between the in-itself and the for-itself, between the "psychological" and the "physical" which enables him to understand both.

This existential notion fits in with what Merleau-Ponty tried to show in SC, namely that the ultimate units of comportment are "dialectical structures." He means nothing obscure by that terminology. Since the represented always has meaning (which he argues extensively in PP) and the body acts according to meaning and by meaning-giving acts, comportment is an "interaction" or "transaction" between the corps propre and the represented. The "interaction," however, is not causal, but is comparable to a dialogue (dialektos in Greek), which is an exchange of meanings.[16]

Merleau-Ponty does not profess to know at what primitive level motor intentionality or meaning-giving acts occur. That there are meaning-giving acts occurring below the threshold of "awareness" has, I think, been amply demonstrated by psychoanalysis; that the world (the represented) has meaning in perception prior to any reflection on it is obvious to anyone who will examine his own experience. In brief, Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre teaches that comportment must be about something, that like perception it is intrinsically intentional. However what perception and comportment are about is not merely what one finds on reflection.

The Corps Propre in Psychology

As we have stated before, Merleau-Ponty's existential notion is not intended primarily to serve as a scientific tool, but to further the project of establishing a non-dualistic philosophy of human existence. This by no means implies that

the doctrine of the corps propre does not have any scientific utility. Taken as a purely theoretical construct rather than as an ontology of human existence, the doctrine of the corps propre is not significantly distinguishable from the general existential notion of man as the being whose essence it is to be <u>at the world</u>[17] (Merleau-Ponty uses <u>etre-au-monde</u>, Heidegger in-der-Welt-Sein).[17]

For the application of this notion in the field of psychiatry[18] the reader is referred to such authors as Ludwig Binswanger, Viktor Frankl, Igor Caruso, Erwin Straus, and Rollo May. For the form it might take in general psychology the reader may consult Adrian von Kaam's excellent summary of the epistemological requirements on constructs in theories of personality.[19] This does not mean that these authors endorse in any manner what is peculiar to Merleau-Ponty regarding the notion of the corps propre.

<u>The Prejugé du Monde</u>

What Merleau-Ponty thinks is primarily or ultimately responsible for the difficulties we have in conceiving human existence without dualisms is an epistemological prejudice--the <u>prejugé du monde</u>. Another term for this is "objectivism" of which both empiricism and intellectualism are guilty. The objectivist believes or acts as if he believed that assertions can be made such that they are true independently of any reference to knowers, or what amounts to the same thing, that if assertions can be made truly of phenomena, they are made

in virtue of a pre-established and universally valid a priori. Both are an implicit claim to knowledge from an absolute, or from no particular standpoint. For Merleau-Ponty knowledge is first of all an experience, originally on the level of every-day perception and then on the level of more systematic knowing, and truth is as contingent as mankind.

From the objectivist standpoint there cannot be more than one true categorical statement about the same matter of fact. The body is either a body or it is not a body, the mind is either mind or it is not mind. How then can they be one reality?

Objectivism is also manifested in the belief that there is only one literal sense in which anything can be said to be the case. This frequently becomes the claim that the only literal language is "scientific" language and conversely. The "real" meaning of anything is what "science" has disclosed or will disclose.[20]

Hence if Merleau-Ponty's language about comportment and perception sounds magical or metaphorical the reason may well be that we feel disinclined to attribute literal validity to such expressions as "being-at-the-world," "lived space and time," "communion with the world," etc. This presupposes that there is one literal sense for "the world" for "space and time" and for "mingling."[21]

Merleau-Ponty believes that the prejugé du monde in psychology and in neurophysiology is manifested in a style of

interpreting certain denotable or quasi-denotable events. This style of interpretation may appropriately be called a philosophical attitude which may be expressed in the following way. One becomes accustomed to treating as "cause," the condition or "variable" which is actually or theoretically isolable within a given event, e.g., the cause of the accident was a flat tire. But then the event as a whole is imagined to be made of an indefinite multiplicity of such conditions, causes or variables. Philosophically, he believes, the consequence is that the variables alone are considered to be "real," while the event as a whole is conceived of as a kind of summation of the variables, which has only derivative "reality."

Merleau-Ponty wishes, as it were, to invert this philosophical attitude at least in psychology and philosophy. He advances reasons for contending that neurophysiology itself will not give an account of, or find the laws or organism as such[22] until the neurophysiologist begins to treat certain functions as irreducible systems. Applying this to classical reflex theory, for example, Merleau-Ponty is saying that at certain levels of "complexity" of merely theoretically isolable functions or processes, there are real and objective functions which one may call meaning-giving acts. Comportment is not, then, a resultant vector of what is alone real (the elementary variables) but exists in its own right. In a word, to attribute a privilege of objectivity to the elemental and to consider

everything else as derivative, if not "epiphenomenal," or due to "anthropomorphism" is a prejudice.

I should perhaps stress that this by no means implies that Merleau-Ponty would have the reflexologist abandon all his projects, or even his methodology, for certain purposes. He does argue, however, that at certain levels structural thinking will be required.

"Structure" is not, then, a hypothesis in the ordinary sense, just as the notions of causality, variable and function are not. The invitation to "structural thinking" is an invitation to a style of thinking. The study of perception and comportment, he believes, require it. He recommends it to the scientist who wishes to deal successfully with these phenomena.

Why Study Perception in Philosophy?

It is very difficult to say what Merleau-Ponty's main contribution to philosophy is. I have often thought that it might consist in what others have called his ambiguity, which is in reality his ability to find mediating notions between extreme positions. He has a rather remarkable ability to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, or to use a more complimentary metaphor, to walk the tight rope of common sense. He is able to maintain equal distances from rationalism and empiricism, from idealism and realism, from dogmatism and relativism. What I think enables him to do this is his principle of the primacy of perception.

This principle may be summarized briefly in the following manner. If one considers his commerce with the world a private affair, he becomes bottled up in his subjectivity. Knowledge then becomes a kind of solipsism or radical relativism. If one considers his commerce with the world as ultimately an act of the intellect, then one has a right to say that all of us are talking about the same world because the world has become idea and is therefore the same for all.

But we can think the world only because we have already experienced it, and it is through that experience that we already have the nascent idea of being, and hence it is through perception that the words rational and real first receive a meaning. There is no reason to treat intersubjectivity as a blind faith, a kind of irrepressible animal instinct, nor to attribute it to our participation in the same intellectual consciousness. The first would not explain even the illusion of objectivity, and the second would tend to suppress the undeniable plurality of consciousnesses. By advocating the primacy of perception, Merleau-Ponty gives a status of ambiguous rationality to what Hume called the natural instincts by which we have belief in matters of fact, and which Hume believed no reason or process of thought is able to produce or prevent.

For Merleau-Ponty this "instinct" is something we can examine, even if we can never establish its de jure character, yet it is not blind. For Merleau-Ponty, though it is from

the depths of personal subjectivity that one sees another subjectivity, he sees him invested with equal rights because the behavior of the other takes place in my perceptual field, and it can then be said that transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity.

It could be objected that this is legitimate as a description of our experience, but does it hold de jure, what justifies it ultimately? I do not think that Merleau-Ponty has given a complete answer to that. He left his philosophy unfinished and as it now stands I think we have to say that for him rationality is something that men attempt to achieve, it is a system of agreements among men, and that those agreements are the highest form of objectivity available to us.

Though this remains a great flaw for those of us who believed that there was security in a final rationality, yet the principle of the primacy of perception will stand as a contribution to inverting the pretense of philosophy or science to achieve difinitive truth and certainty by making of perception and our spontaneous convictions merely confused and imperfect philosophy or science. It is rather the opposite, philosophy and science are achievements which have forgotten their source in the founding term, which is our commerce with the world in living perception.

Summary

Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre is a philosophical picture of how he conceives human existence. If we look at the picture we may be amused, or revolted, or have any number of reactions. We may also be inclined to a Metanoia (a turning about of the mind) not to discover the truth, but to take another "look" at ourselves and the world from a new perspective. As Merleau-Ponty says, "Philosophy is not the reflection on a pre-existing truth, but like art, the act of bringing truth into being," and ". . . true philosophy consists in re-learning to look at the world." (PP xv, PP xx)

If Merleau-Ponty does not succeed in conceiving how it is possible for there to be an in-itself-for-itself, it may be that he has gained some important ground as to how the problem may be stated so that a solution will be possible. It is impossible to imagine how a bronze statue could be anything but both a statue and bronze (to use Aristotle's analogy for the way body and soul are one), but it is not equally obvious how a body can have experience and exercise intentionality, how an animal or human being can be a body and a consciousness.

Whether Merleau-Ponty's picture is more philosophically viable or less so than other positions can only be evaluated by one willing to enter into his concerns. All that I can hope to accomplish here is present some of the reasons why I

think his program is worth pursuing. It will no doubt appear that I do little more than present his claims with meagre substantiation. This could not be otherwise, for the genuine scope of the discussion is nothing less than an ontology of human existence.

Perhaps it would not be amiss for me to here disclose what has prompted my interest in Merleau-Ponty.

First of all it is his analysis of enmattered spirit which has made the ancient notion of mind or soul most intelligible to me. In the corps propre which is neither physiological nor psychological, neither non-intentional nor pure existence for-itself, I recognize myself better than in any other notion of the self that I have encountered in philosophy.

Another primary motive for my interest in him flows from this basic one. Merleau-Ponty's epistemology (even in its incomplete state) contributes enormously to a major effort of other modern thinkers to free the human sciences from narrowly conceived explanatory and quantitative methods.

But in a general way what I find satisfying about his philosophy is that it is to a great extent in harmony with the efforts of certain other modern philosophers such as Bergson, Collingwood, Whitehead, Husserl and Polanyi, and I think that is very good company.

Footnotes to Introduction:

1. Aristotle, On the Soul, Bk. II, ch. 4 (415b 14). Also cf. idem Bk. II, ch. 1 (412b 6)

2. Idem, Bk. I, ch. 4 (408b 11)

3. Idem, Bk. I, ch. 1 (403a 8); Bk. I, ch. 4 (408b 18); Bk. II, ch. 8 (420b 27-30).

4. Idem, Bk. II, ch. 4 (415b 10).

5. In his last major work he says ". . . what one might consider to be psychology in Phenomenology of Perception is actually ontology." Le Visible et l'Invisible, p. 230. This work was left unfinished.

6. This is what Whitehead expresses, I think, when he says, ". . . an account of the general character of what we know must enable us to frame an account of how knowledge is possible as an adjunct within things known." Science and the Modern World, p. 142.

7. Cf. Warren Weaver, "The Imperfections of Science," Proceedings of the American Philosopnical Society. Vol. 104 (1966) p. 422.

8. I choose to use the word "comportment" rather than "behavior" because of the heavily laden connotations of the latter term in scientific psychology, and because it takes on a considerably different meaning in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

9. References to the Structure of Behavior (SB) and to Merleau-Ponty's other major work, Phenomenology of Perception (PP), will be made within the text and will be enclosed in parentheses. The French version of SB will be designated as SC for La Structure du Comportement. The first page number refers to the French version, the second to the English version.

10. This is reminiscent of the first lines of Bergson's Matter and Memory. He too, sought to affirm "the reality of mind, the reality of matter, and attempted to determine the relationship between them." (p. 1) There are frequent and close parallels between Merleau-Ponty's notion of the corps propre and Bergson's notion of the body in philosophy. Bergson calls the body an "image" (something between matter and representation) which has the unique character that one knows it from without in perception and from within by affection. (Idem. p. 11)

11. Cybernetic notions also fit Merleau-Ponty's very general notion of "structure." They exhibit invariance under transformation, which is probably the simplest and most general definition of "structure" for Merleau-Ponty. (SC 49-50, SB 47) He was familiar with the basic cybernetic notion of feedback in the form of Wertheimer's "transverse functions" (Querfunktionen). Cf. Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung." Zeitshrift fur Psychologie, (1912).

12. This effect is known in behavioristic psychology as Humphrey's paradox, cf. Osgood, C., Method and Theory in Experimental Psychology, p. 210.

13. Cf. Husserl, E., Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins, p. 430, also Formale und Transzendentale Logik, p. 208. Cited by Merleau-Ponty in PP 478, PP 418. It is appropriate to mention here that Merleau-Ponty seems to regard Husserl as his greatest teacher. However, he is very partial to Husserl's later works and in fact hardly mentions the earlier ones, except to draw out what he believes is a progressive transition in Husserl's thought, "from the eidetic method. . . of the earlier stage to the existentialism of the last period." (PP 317, PP274) Merleau-Ponty obtained access to the unedited Husserlian manuscripts from Father von Breda at the Louvain.

14. Robert Sokolowski in his book The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution (1964), tries to show that Husserl was gradually abandoning the "schema" of hyletic data and noetic activity. Cf. op cit. passim. Gurwitsch goes so far as to call Husserl's theory of perception dualistic. Cf. Gurwitsch, Aron, The Field of Consciousness, Part IV ch. II, 6. Also "Edmund Husserl," Review of Metaphysics, Vol. XIX, No. 4 (June 1966).

15. I even hesitate to use the clear sounding phrase "meaning-giving act", for it seems to imply that something is given meaning that did not have it before. By the term motor intentionality Merleau-Ponty wishes to convey the idea that the "motricity" and the "meaning" are identified in the comportmental act.

16. That electromagnetic oscillations, retinal changes and brain pulses are involved is taken for granted by Merleau-Ponty, but according to him they are not what make comportment intelligible as comportment.

17. The usual translation of these French and German terms is being-in-the world. The "in" has spatial connotations that inadequately express the dimensions which the term is intended to convey. I ask the readers' indulgence to use "at" because it is the term one uses for involvement in a task of almost any kind or scope. "About" might be even better, were it not so gauche. To be a human being is to be at the world, as one is at his job, or about his business. Maurice Natanson suggests the phrase "being in reality." Cf. his article "Being in Reality," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. XX, no. 2 (Dec. 1959); also "Existential Categories in Contemporary Literature," Carolina Quarterly, (1959) "What I take to be central and decisive for all existential philosophy is a concern for what I wish to call man's being in reality," p. 19.

18. Richard Schmitt argues that the notion of "structure" is not only useless in the sciences but unnecessary in philosophy. Cf. his article "Maurice Merleau-Ponty I," Review of Metaphysics, Vol. XIX, no. 3 (March 1966), pp. 500-505.

19. Von Kaam, Adrian., "A Comprehensive Theory of Personality," Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, Vol. III, no. 1 (1963).

20. For a lucid and engaging presentation of literalness (also called idolatry) as the "besetting sin" of today's thinking, see Owen Barfield's Saving the Appearances, passim, esp. p. 162.

21. The chapters on spatiality and temporality in Phenomenology of Perception show decisively, I think, that to attribute the "literal" sense of space and time to "objective" space and time is due to a failure to examine our experience. Heidegger shows this in a different but equally profound way in Being and Time, pp. 138 sqq.

22. Basically this is the contention of certain "open systems" theorists. Ludwig von Bertalanffy for example argues that there is a "principle of complementarity" in biology, i.e., a fundamental limitation on the possibility of investigating isolated processes in the organism. Cf. "General Systems Theory: A New Approach to the Unity of Science," Human Biology, Vol 22-23 (1950-51), passim esp. p. 348.

PART ONE

THE STRUCTURE OF COMPORTMENT

Avant propos

In the first two chapters of the Structure of Behavior, Merleau-Ponty undertakes an analysis of the underlying philosophical postulates of what were then the predominant contemporary psychological theories, namely: (a) classical reflex theory, (b) Pavlovian reflexology, (c) some theories of the "central sector" of the brain intended to correct "atomistic" neurophysiological views, (d) behavioristic learning theory which did not purport to "neurologize," and (e) Gestalt theory.

He argues that (a), (b), and (c) above come up against fundamental limitations in attempting to explain comportment, and concludes that they are more faithful to preconceived notions of nerve functioning than to what an open-minded interpretation might otherwise suggest. Behavioristic learning theory is then shown to be overly subservient to the "scientific" ethos, which prevents it from conceiving "stimuli" and "responses" as meaning structures. Finally, he argues that Gestalt psychology reintroduces the classical dichotomies by speaking of an "inside" and an "outside" in comportment and perception.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical analysis of the underlying assumptions of his contemporary psychologists will perforce be

sketched very briefly. Summary as my presentation of his analysis may be, it will illustrate how the notion of "structure" (which develops into the notion of the corps propre) emerges from Merleau-Ponty's careful reading of his contemporary scientific psychologists and from a refined philosophical sense of certain inadequacies in their basic conceptions.

CHAPTER ONE

"ATOMISTIC" THEORIES OF COMPORTMENT

Classical Reflex Theory

The Reflex Arc. Basing himself apparently[1] on the work of V. F. von Weizsacker, K. Goldstein and F. J. J. Buytendijk, Merleau-Ponty addresses his criticism primarily to Sherrington. Merleau-Ponty observes that the distinction introduced by Sherrington of exteroceptivity, interoceptivity and proprioceptivity seems obvious at first. But this scientist's own work and that of his contemporaries forced them to concede that there is probably never any instance of a pure exteroceptive reflex, that is, one which needs only the intervention of an external stimulus in order to take place. "All reflexes demand the concurrence of a multitude of conditions in the organism external to the reflex arc which have as much right as the "stimulus" to be called causes of the reactions." (SC 15 SB 17)

Merleau-Ponty refers to these "additional conditions" as transverse functions (Querfunktionen) following Wertheimer.[2]

In classical reflex theory these additional conditions are conceived as higher level automatisms governing lower level ones, by inhibition for example. Merleau-Ponty brings this out by illustrating how certain observations are interpreted. For example, the plantar flexion reflex of the toes evoked by stimulation of the sole depends so much on cerebral conditions that the appearance of the dorsal extension reflex in place of flexor movements is taken to be a sign of a lesion of the pyramidal tracts (Babinski). Sherrington's interpretation is that the extension reflex is always ready to function but is inhibited by the pyramidal excitations favoring the phasic medullar reflexes (of external origin) at the expense of the tonic and proprioceptive reflexes.[3] Merleau-Ponty points out that the hypothetical construct of an extension reflex always ready to function in the normal subject, requires another construct, namely an inhibitory factor. But this inhibitory factor is posited in order to justify the absence of an assumed extension reflex.(SC 18 SB 19)

That the purpose of the hypothetical inhibition is to maintain the classical reflex theory rather than to understand nerve activity is suggested by an alternative interpretation. Drawing upon Goldstein,[4] Merleau-Ponty remarks that the extension reflex is also encountered in peripheral paralysis, where the path which goes from the cortex to the pyramidal tracts and to the anterior horns is in no way involved. It cannot then be due to inhibitions of pyramidal excitations. If the exten-

sion reflex is conditioned by reversal of the chronaxies (those of the flexor muscles becoming higher than those of the extensor muscles making extension easier than flexion) it could be said that the relationship of these chronaxies is determined by the nerve and motor situation of the whole organism. It would follow that the action of the brain on reflex activity is no longer that of a kind of authorization given or refused (excitation or inhibition) by a higher instance, to automatic and autonomous processes. On this view the brain loses its role of automatic governor of mechanisms which are ready to function, and assumes a positive role in the very constitution of reflex responses. The effect of cerebral influences would be to actively organize behavior, not merely to release or activate pre-established devices.

The response. Even if there were specific stimuli, receptors and nerve pathways, they would not of themselves account for the appropriateness of responses to the stimuli, for the movement to be executed depends upon the initial position of the members, which is variable. "In a scratch reflex, the muscular contractions necessary to bring my hand to the point stimulated are very different depending on whether my hand happens to be extended initially toward the right or toward the left." (SC 28, SB 28) Are there then as many pre-established circuits at the point scratched as there are possible initial positions for my hand? If there are how does the stimulus choose the right one?

Merleau-Ponty says that Sherrington's own work shows that the adaptation of the response to the stimulus and of the mutual adaptation of the parts of the response cannot be explained by the autonomy of pre-established nerve pathways for Sherrington introduces inhibitions and control devices which are superimposed on the simple reflex arcs. It is possible to argue that the difference between the traditional schema (S-R) and actual nerve activity is only the difference between the simple and the complex, but since the additional circuits are conceived on the same model the solution is in fact merely deferred. A moment never comes when something constitutes the adaptation of nerve functioning instead of undergoing it.[5] Classical physiology of the reflex seems to require that function be a product of existing devices, and in effect denies objective reality to the function as such. Function becomes a "human" manner of designating the effects of the mechanisms.

Gestalt interpretation of the response.

Following Koffka, "Kohler and Goldstein, Merleau-Ponty examines a number of instances in which the need for structural models seems necessary to explain certain observed phenomena. Perhaps one of the simplest and most striking is the case of the dung beetle, which can continue walking immediately after amputation of one or several phalanges. The movements of the remaining stumps are not those executed in normal walking. Further, these novel movements of the organ occur only when the situation requires it. On a rough surface where the stump can

find support, the normal walk is resumed then immediately abandoned when the animal comes upon a smooth surface. (SC 39-40, SB 39) If the explanation of this phenomenon were that a pre-established stand-by device were involved, it would not explain why the device is brought into operation only when the pressure of external conditions required it. This suggests that the reflex is relatively independent of the individual nerves and muscles. Reflex activity would be more appropriately conceived as a kind of system capable of improvising approximate substitutions (without becoming the exact equivalent of the reaction which has become impossible) able to maintain the function of the organism. Since an almost constant functional result is obtained by variable "means," Merleau-Ponty says, it would be correct to say that it is the function which permits us to understand the organism. (SC 38, SB 38) And since the spontaneous re-organization of the function represents a return to as great an equilibrium as possible for the system taken as a unity, one may speak objectively of "preferred" behavior. It would be more in keeping with observed reactions ". . . to consider the afferent sector of the nervous system as a field of forces which express concurrently the intraorganic state and the influence of external agents; these forces tend to balance themselves according to certain modes of preferred distribution and to obtain movements from the mobile parts of the body which are proper to this effect." (SB 46, SC 48)

If it seems that this advocacy of "structure" is trivial,

It may be due to the fact that it is not far removed from our average understanding of our own actions and milieu. But it is fraught with consequences. Centuries of technological advances and success in the physical sciences have tended to confirm what is apparently a basic philosophical attitude exemplified in such thinkers as Lucretius and Democritus. The apparent independence of the activity of "molecular" events has made it seem that "molar" wholes such as our own bodies are made up of a multiplicity of real elemental functions, which often implies that the natural wholes given in immediate experience are derivative, "appearances," "epiphenomenal," and in any case somehow less real. As Merleau-Ponty puts it ". . . the physicist's atoms will always appear more real than the historical and qualitative face of the world, the physico-chemical processes more real than organic forms, the psychological atoms of empiricism more real than perceived phenomena, the intellectual atoms represented by the significations of the Vienna Circle more real than consciousness, as long as the attempt is made to build up the shape of the world (life, perception, mind) instead of recognizing as the source which stares us in the face and the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge of these things, our experience of them." (PP 31, PP 23)

One of the major objections that could be made to the general notion of structure is that it is of such wide scope

as to render it useless in science. Such an objection fails to grasp the status it is intended to have. As a scientific tool it is a basic category like causality. There is "structure" even in some physical events perhaps, for structure is a system whose properties are modified by any change brought about in a single one of its theoretically isolable parts, and whose properties remain when all those "parts" change as long as they maintain the same relationship among themselves. (SC 49, SB 47) Most actual nerve phenomena seem to fit such a definition.

Another perhaps more devastating objection to Merleau-Ponty's "structure" is that his so-called theoretically isolable parts are the physiologist's stock in trade, and the philosopher's advice to abandon them is preposterous. Merleau-Ponty, however, has not said that reflexology was a vain enterprise. He says that as it is conceived in the classical tradition it follows a philosophical prejudice which forces it to imagine the genesis of natural wholes, and of intentional and preferred acts, as anatomical results of a multitude of blind events. Merleau-Ponty does not advocate the abandonment of even the classical neuro-physiology by any manner of means.

It is true that by a curious reversal Merleau-Ponty must say that to consider reflexes as constituting comportment is an anthropomorphic illusion. Yet he must also disagree with those reflexologists for whom the reflex is an abstraction, a mere hypothetical entity. The reflex is quite probably real.

It represents a very special case of animal reaction. (SC 48, SB 46) "But it is not the principle object of neurophysiology; for it is not by means of it that the remainder can be understood." (idem) It is not every reaction, Merleau-Ponty says, found in the investigation of sick or partial organisms which manifest biological reality. If comportment is defined by the superposition of an enormous number of elementary reflexes or by introducing a vital force, one capitulates to the postulates of mechanism or vitalism rather than accepting what is there for our observation, namely the indecomposable structures of comportment.

Hence when Merleau-Ponty says that the notion of "structure" is not a hypothesis but a new category (SC 49, SB 47), he means that it is a new basic idea in the science of comportment, not that it is one that we have not been familiar with all of our lives. "The notion of structure merely expresses the descriptive properties of certain natural wholes." (SC 54, SB 51)

Can "Structure" be defined?

Merleau-Ponty does not advert to the extreme difficulty of defining structure with anything like unequivocal precision. As an instance of this difficulty we may cite the second criterion of Ehrenfels for a Gestalt, that it be transposable, which can also be expressed by saying that a Gestalt is invariant under transformations. The example of a melody in different keys is often given as a clear instance of a transposable whole.

But a variation on a theme is also invarient under transformations, and plagiarism or even a caricature of a musical composition possesses some invariance under transformations.

To this objection I think Merleau-Ponty would answer that despite the hopelessness of bed-rock definitions or ideas which always turn out to seem arbitrary, we are still "condemned to meaning" (PP xiv, PP xix), and the meanings we find are "good" anthropomorphism which accomplishes what seemed impossible when we concentrated on the separate elements.

Merleau-Ponty is well aware of a kind of tyranny that reflective thought can exercise, which might forbid us from relying upon a notion which cannot be defined in a universally acceptable way. One of the great historical instances of the tyranny of reflective thought is found in his countryman Descartes. How is it that Descartes can conclude that "all other things we conceive to be compounded out of figure, extension, motion?"[6] Is it in fact because we know them so clearly and distinctly that they cannot be analyzed by the mind into others more distinctly known? In the Second Meditation where he analyzes the piece of wax, Descartes concludes that extension and mobility are the only constant qualities that cannot be done away with by the mind's inspection of the wax. But is it true that a body can be imagined without figure, and hence without color, or without resistance? As E. A. Burtt has pointed out, "Descartes' real criterion is not permanence but the possibility of mathematical handling."[7]

Pavlov's theory of the conditioned reflex

Pavlov's program is inspired by the assumption that the commerce of the organism with its environment is a physical and neurophysiological process.[8] If this is so it is incumbent upon the investigator to study comportment as one would study physics and physiology. Since it was and remains impossible to begin with physiology, Pavlov felt justified in making constructs to account for what is actually observed. Pavlov's conditioned reflex theory is a system of such constructs, in this case of presumed neurophysiological processes, and arose out of his conviction that elementary reflex theory could not account for the richness and variety of behavior.

Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Pavlov's theory may be classed under three headings: (1) though the theory purports to be thoroughly "objective," it in fact deals mostly if not solely with molar and in fact with phenomenal events. (2) To consider the "molar stimulus" as a segregated fact apart from its being this "stimulus" for this organism is naive. (3) The constructs by which Pavlov accounts for the variety of responses are rediscriptions of comportment couched in neurophysiological terms. Merleau-Ponty then presents reasons for saying that the relationships between the molar-events-for-the-organism and comportment seem not to be causes and effects, but meanings-for-the-organism and adaptation to these meanings.

Pavlov's models of nerve action are conceived as elementary

processes, and there is supposed to be a one to one correspondence between such processes and the environment as physical reality. Following the Gestaltists we may refer to this physical reality as the geographical environment. Now, as Merleau-Ponty points out, the usual types of "stimuli" that are spoken of even in the controlled environment of the laboratory are of the order of decidedly molar events. If one is attempting to carry out a rigorous "objective" project it is not enough to speak of, say, meat as a "visual stimulus;" rather one should speak of radiant energies that activate receptors. If one does speak of meat as a stimulus, one can speak of meat-in-the-brown-dish, and of being-my-master-moving-his-hand-indicating-that-I-should-sit-down as individual stimuli. One is in effect speaking of Gestalten or of "structures" as Merleau-Ponty says.

It is not merely a matter of molar description versus molecular description, however, for even if molar events may be taken as "individual stimuli" (light, sound, chunk of meat, etc.) such "elements" have little or no relationship to the same "elements" taken in simple combinations much less in complex combinations. This means not only that the animal reacts to "structure" if it reacts to anything, but that it reacts to structure as it is for the animal. We may of course postulate an infinite number of "structures" in the world. It is no doubt possible to imagine that the geographical environment contains all the ingredients to which the animal reacts. But is

it possible to find causal laws between the environment so conceived and behavior?

Pavlov believed that he had found such laws. In the laboratory environment where the stimulus (as something outside and independent of the animal) can be fairly well controlled, it seems legitimate to grant that some sort of correlation can be established between the geographical environment and the organism's response. However, only a physicalistic presupposition requires us to think of that correlation as one of causality, for it could just as well be one of motives or reasons.

In addition when the animal is observed in its natural habitat there is no possible way to specify the stimulus for a particular response save by observing the response. The naturalist makes use of just such observations, but would have to be accused of "anthropomorphism." And in any case to say that the stimulus fires the response does not give us any information that we did not already have without the theory of the conditioned reflex.[9] (SC 59, SB 55)

That the "stimulus" is intrinsically related to the animal's "response" is akin to the problem of subject and object in philosophy. It is not surprising that Pavlov does not solve it.

It may seem that Pavlov neatly avoids having to postulate an "infinite number of structured properties" in the geographical environment by attributing what philosophers have called

the synthetic activity of the subject to conditioned inhibitions and conditioned counter-inhibitions. An explanation of why a dog conditioned to salivate to a beam-of-light (L) but not to salivate to a-beam-of-light-and-a sound (S & L), seems to be afforded by saying that the sound is an inhibitor of exactly the same strength as the light is reflexogenic. But Pavlov has to say this only because he presupposes that in the case of L & S, both L & S remain stimuli in their own right. The idea of inhibition as a positive process becomes unavoidable only on the assumption that it is necessary to treat the responses as a result of a sum of the excitations which would be produced by each of the partial stimuli. But a dog conditioned to the series, light-high pitched sound-contact, does not react to the series, light-high pitched sound- low pitched sound-contact. Is then low-pitched-sound as inhibiting as the rest of the series is reflexogenic? To those accused of "anthropomorphism," properties seem to be there for the asking; but it may be wondered if Pavlov is so different from them in so far as constructs are there for the asking.

The superb convenience of the postulated inhibiting conditioned reflexes and counter-inhibiting conditioned reflexes--the positing of constructs which operate in opposite directions, makes it impossible for Pavlov to be proven wrong. (SC 63, SB 59) But this merely complicates matters and does not give us any new information (SC 61, SB 57), for the genuine referents of inhibition and counter-inhibition remain aspects of

comportment that can be described and are made known by observation. Thus, in the study of animal comportment it might be said that, for a chimpanzee, a climbing pole can be the "same stimulus" as a keeper, for the animal will try to climb up on him to reach an overhanging fruit.[10] All of this is adequately and more simply expressed by saying that the chimpanzee responds to the meaning-for-him of what he sees.

To say that the chimpanzee reacts to the meaning-for-him of "climbing-pole" and "keeper" stated in construct neurophysiological language is an equivocation not because these terms fail to give us a description of what takes place, but because they purport to be more objective and scientific, whereas they are misleading and more cumbersome. Most significantly misleading in that the terms connote positive, causal processes functioning in complete automaticity (en troisiéme personne) whereas they denote events characterized by generality and meaning. I am here anticipating what begins to emerge from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of behavioristic learning theory[11] and is given extensive support in his analysis of perception.

Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Pavlov merely shows that the construct neurophysiology of the latter brings us back to and in fact never departs from phenomenal givens. It does not, then, prove that the program is de jure impossible, but only that Pavlov fails de facto even to initiate it. Striking evidence that it is unreasonable to expect that it can ever be carried

out is offered by an examination of how certain attempts to salvage a neurophysiological interpretation of comportment against the damaging evidence of lesions to the "central sector" of the brain; are forced back either to an "atomism" that such interpretations are intended to overcome, or to what is in fact a counterpart of "mentalism."

The "central sector" of the brain

In the theory of conditioned reflexes and in the classical reflex theory, the nervous system is conceived of as directing behavior by an action comparable to that of a feedback mechanism controlling a ship's tiller. It seems that such a conception is only applicable to the cerebral cortex where the afferent and efferent nerve fibers are punctually projected. But the existence of conditioned reactions in invetebrates and even in protozoa suggests that these reactions are not linked to particular anatomical devices and that such reactions may express a general property of organic comportment. (SC 66, SB 62) Buytendijk's question is appropos, ". . . in nerve phenomena are we dealing with the functions of the structure, or with functional structures?" (SC 65, SB 61)

Very complicated attempts to explain even basic behavior arise when one begins with physiology. One must then try to understand how the "elements" are brought together and above all how they function as a unit. It is at least as difficult as trying to derive the properties of water from the properties

of oxygen and hydrogen taken separately. Such problems of course would not arise, at least not in the same way, if "structure" had been chosen as the guiding concept in physiology and psychology and not the "particle." (SC 60, SB 56)

Thus in attempting to understand the results of investigations concerning central nerve functioning it has become necessary to conceive of "wholistic" disorders or "mass action" provoked by lesions in determinate regions of the cortex. Lashley's experiments[13] involving central cortical lesions in rats do not result in behavior that is readily explained by a multitude of anatomical devices in which each would be pre-disposed to a certain movement. Neither the elementary movements of the rat nor the sensory descriminations which they involve seem to be affected after cauterization of the central frontal cortical regions (the association zone), but the animal is gauche, and his movements are slow and rigid.

It is clear that peripheral lesions may make certain "stimuli" impossible from a particular area of the body, just as closing the eyelids deprives one of light, and the result may be the elimination of a certain stock of movements. "Atomistic" physiology is more apt to disclose conditions correlated with certain well determined disorders here. And it seems reasonable to assume that what is involved in the cortical lesion is that a "regulatory system," capable of giving <u>general</u> characteristics to behavior has been affected. The difficulty becomes one of understanding how those regulatory devices are

to be conceived. Is it enough to conceive them as elementary processes, damage to which makes specific actions impossible? Are they global processes which could be conceived as isomorphic to the structural character of the disorder? Or are there other alternatives?

Merleau-Ponty examines some of the evidence against the notion that the regulatory systems might be particulate processes. Gelb and Goldstein have shown[14] that cortical lesions rarely induce disorders of fragments of normal comportment, if these "fragments" are considered as contents such as brain traces or other neurophysiological constructs. Thus the aphasic or apraxic patient is able or unable to execute certain verbal or other actions depending respectively on whether they occur in concrete and affective situations or whether they are "gratuitous," e.g., when the patients are told to perform them on command. The capacity to move or speak is not lost, but a certain type of speaking or acting is impaired.[15] There is a deficiency of a fundamental function which Gelb and Goldstein have called the "categorial attitude"[16] and Head[17] has called the "power of symbolic expression."

If these descriptions are accurate the pathological condition must concern not the content of the comportment but its significance for the organism. But this means that the disorder cannot in principle be observed as a merely "objective" process, for it is a disorder only in so far as it is an "attitude" which does not function. Approached from the purely physiologi-

cal standpoint there is no disorder for the patient can still execute the same movements in "concrete" situations.

It would be more in keeping with these observations, Merleau-Ponty contends, to assert that certain forms of comportment depend on the cerebral cortex

> . . . not in that they are made up of the same elementary movements whose memos or orders would be located there, but in as much as they are of the same structure, permit classification under the same idea, and are situated on the same human level. Normal sexual initiatives and the lucid handling of cubes, equally compromised in the case of Schneider[18] have no elementary movement nor real part in common, they permit classification and even definition only by means of certain "anthropomorphic" predicates. (SC 79, SB 72)

This type of analysis is radically different from one that would look for the injury to "parts" or imagine that something had been subtracted from normal comportment. A qualitative alteration has taken place, and we have to do with a new molecule with new properties, so to speak. But these new "properties" are new styles of comportment common to a multitude of symptoms, and the relation of the essential disorder to the symptoms seem to be rather the logical relation of principle to consequence, rather than of cause to effect. (SC 70, SB 65)

Merleau-Ponty observes that most authors act as if it were enough to correct the "atomism" of a viewpoint like Pavlov's with notions of "integration" or "coordination." Using examples taken from spatial perception, chromatic perception and the physiology of language, he attempts to show that even some of the authors who are convinced that the coordinating centers

cannot be thought of as storehouses of ready-made traces, compromise with "atomism" rather than solving its problems.

The illustration taken from the physiology of language is perhaps the clearest. The French neurophysiologist Pieron[19] attributes to the "coordinating center" the structuring of heard phonemes, but the center is conceived of as possessing as many regulatory devices as there are words. "It is difficult to see what distinguishes them (the regulatory devices) from cerebral traces which the author wanted to eliminate." (SC 95, SB 85)

The notions of integration and coordination as understood by Pieron remain attached to a particulate neurophysiological model, and the words "integration" and "coordination" merely serve to designate certain presumed physical structures by which partial activities are consolidated or synthesized in some manner.[20] "How does it happen, then," Merleau-Ponty asks, "that the elementary influxes on the auditory receptors act precisely on the right key, find immediately the pathways posited as prepared for them, since the initial phoneme can belong to so many different words and resemblances of these words can extend to all the constitutive phonemes in the case of homonymy?" (SC 95, 86) But the really big joker is that no matter how complex the device may be imagined to be or how ingenious, how could phonemes and morphemes become "words" as long as they were taken for what they "are" (air waves or nerve impulses) and not for what they mean? (SC 96, SB 86)

Of course it is possible to conceive of a dynamism of physiology which is isomorphic to a dynamism of psychology as does Gestalt theory. But even then it would have to be said that the physiological processes which "correspond" to the utterance must be improvised, actively constituted at the moment of hearing.

As one moves toward the center of the cortex to attempt to explain the neurophysiological conditions of behavior, less and less seems intelligible in terms of nerve substance, and is more and more found in qualitative modes of functions. But it is only if it is assumed that the parts are "real" that we feel compelled to appeal to a "higher principle" whether it be coordinating centers or a vital force.

One may well wonder whether the assertion that the perception of speech is a matter of the brain coordinating sounds is anything more than a counterpart of the assertion that the mind "interprets" what the body "hears," with the added disadvantage that it does not even attempt to deal with the problem of meaning. In general it appears that every separation of the units of perception and comportment from meaning reenstates either interactionism or epiphenomenalism. How Merleau-Ponty's notion of structure attempts to keep them together begins to emerge in his analysis of behavioristic learning theory.

Footnotes for chapter one.

1. These are the authors most frequently cited in this section of SC.

2. They correspond grosso modo to what Hull calls "intervening variables," and to what is called feedback in cybernetics.

3. The source is directly from V. F. von Weizäcker, "Reflexgesetze," in Handbuch der Normalen und Pathologischen Physiologie.

4. Goldstein, K., Der Aufbau des Organismus, pp. 90 sqq.

5. Some authors are tempted to allow "intelligence" to intervence at this point. (SC 29, SB 29) Merleau-Ponty observes that there are many cases in which intelligence in any ordinary sense cannot be invoked. For example, if while pointing to an object with my right hand, I am asked to designate it with my left, I succeed in doing so without judgment. "I execute the proposed task (the conclusion) without thinking of what I must do (the premises). (Idem) Instances of this kind, where a "problem" posed by the milieu is resolved without the intervention of what is ordinarily referred to as "thinking" are important for Merleau-Ponty. They bring to light a directed activity between blind mechanism and intelligent behavior. But his is more appropriately left for later, cf., chapter II infra.

6. Descartes, R., Philosophical Works, Vol. I, p. 41.

7. Burtt, Edwin, A., The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science, p. 117.

8. Not all behaviorists, of course, consider it necessary to speak of physiology. In fact Merleau-Ponty believes that when Watson spoke of behavior he had in mind what others have called existence. (SC 3 footnote, SB 4 footnote)

9. A similar argument is made by Noam Chomsky in his "Review of B. G. Skinner's Verbal Behavior," The Structure of Language, Readings in the Philosophy of Language (1964). Edited by J. Katz and J. Fodor, p. 552.

10. An observation by Köhler. Cf. The Mentality of Apes, p. 48.

11. Cf. p. 50 infra.

12. Cf. p. infra.

13. Cf. K. S. Lashley, Brain Mechanisms and Intelligence, U. of Chicago Press (1929).

14. Gelb, A., and Goldstein, K., "Zur Psychologie des optischen Wahrnehmungs und Erkenntnisforganges," in Psychologiische Analyzen Hirnpathologischer Falle, Vol. I, Ch. 1, (1920). (Cf. SC 70, SB 65)

15. Neither Merleau-Ponty nor these authors would want to deny that "elemental processes" might be corrected by a neurophysiological surgeon, thereby making the function possible again. Two questions are actually involved. One is primarily a neurophysiological problem, i.e., to what extent is the brain indispensable for meaning-giving processes to take place? The other is primarily a philosophical problem, i.e., how can a lesion affect what is appropriately called a symbolic function?

16. Goldstein, K., Aufbau des Organismus, p. 29.

17. Cited by Goldstein, op. cit., p. 30.

18. A patient with a lesion in the "occipital zone" studied extensively by Gold and Goldstein.

19. Pieron, H., Le Cerveau et la Pensée, (1923) p. 243.

20. This is essentially one of the basic problems discussed in recent structural linguistics in non-physiological terms. Cf. Jerrold Katz and Jerry Fodor, op. cit., regarding the "projection problem," esp. p. 481.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NOTION OF "STRUCTURE" APPLIED TO LEARNING THEORY AND GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

Behavioristic Learning Theory

The conditioned reflex theory was above all an hypothesis intended to explain the expansion of the reflexogenic field of the animal. Hence the decisive point for it should be to explain the acquisition of new and adapted modes of comportment. According to Pavlov the "stimuli" to which animals react are in the physical "objective" world,[1] and the relationship of the animal to the world is an "objective" process, i.e., the comportment of the animal in a situation whether novel or not does not require us to conceive the reflexogenic field as a field of signification or meaning for the animal.

It is of course obvious that the animal's comportment is not "blind" in the sense that it reacts randomly under any and all situations--in a word, it learns. Behaviorism does not deny that the organism must be such that learning exhibit characteristics of generality. Behavior clearly involves some sort of generalization of the "stimuli" (irradiation) and some sort of restriction of the generalization (discrimination).[2] The difference between a conception such as Merleau-Ponty's and that of behaviorism lies in how that generalization and descrimination are to be envisaged.

Merleau-Ponty observes that if we merely describe it, learning does not appear to be the addition of physical and

individual connections established within the organism between physical and individual "stimuli" and physical and objective movements. It appears rather as an alteration of comportment manifested in a multitude of actions whose "contents" (physical and individual conditions) are variable while their general character remains constant. But what is involved in the acquisition of an ability to react to what is "general," which is in effect an ability to escape from the individual contents of an individual situation?

What Merleau-Ponty contends is involved may be brought out by the following analysis. A photoelectric cell can be built which "responds" only to specified radiant energies. The cell could be constructed with particular thresholds and thus be enabled to "discriminate" various ranges of light. A "discriminatory" apparatus of this sort we will say is wholly dependent on the physical (though not on the individual) contents for its activation. To use Merleau-Ponty's phrase the reaction is wholly "submerged in the contents."[3] The "sensitivity" of the photo-electric cell is only to the "generality"--radiant energy of specified light. The discriminations of protozoa may seem to be essentially of the same sort, for their reactions seem at least profoundly submerged in specific physical conditions such as chemical and energy displacements and changes.

But in higher animals at least, most discriminations do not seem intelligible at all in terms of "sub-aspects" such

as chemical changes and radiant energies, etc. To give an instance, sunfish accustomed to both white and black bread given at different times will begin to treat white morsels differently if chalk is mixed in with the white bread. The modification of comportment is acquired rather slowly. If then, black bread and rubber are presented to the fish, the modification of comportment (from that to all black bread) is acquired more rapidly than to the chalk and white bread. Now, when the fish are fed chalk and white bread again the modifications of behavior are even more rapid. "Thus the inhibitions acquired with regard to the pieces of chalk made it possible for the animal to acquire inhibitions more rapidly with regard to the pieces of rubber and inversely." (SC 107, SB 97) It is not to certain physical aspects or even to the aspect "food" that the animal has adapted, but to speak a human language, to a certain style of deceiving. (Idem.) If the behaviorist agrees that it is precisely to the stimulus "style of deceiving" to which the fish reacts and which it has discriminated, then there is no difference between what Merleau-Ponty says and what the behaviorist says. The matter would be a mere disputatio de verbis.

Merleau-Ponty goes on to argue that the attribution of discrimination of a "style of deceiving" is not introjection or an illegitimate use of anthropomorphic predicates. When one states that a photo-electric cell "discriminates," he is not introjecting consciousness into the cell, but describing

something he observes. Likewise when one says that a fish discerns a deception, he is not introjecting consciousness into the fish but observing what may turn out to be a lawful or lawlike comportmental sequence. There is, to be sure, evidence of some sort of consciousness in the fish, just as there is when we see someone swerve his car a few seconds prior to what would otherwise have been an accident. We do not have to "get inside" the motorist to understand what he did, nor is this "understanding" an inference, as will be established in more detail later on.[4] Enough has been said, however, to illustrate why Merleau-Ponty believes that the shying away from "anthropomorphic predicates" is not a defense of objectivity, but a defense of the presupposition that "elementary" variables and physically causal relationships should be made to account for everything. It is not parsimony but penury.

We have been stressing the "generality" of the "stimulus." Something may now be added regarding the "generality" of the "response." It was remarked earlier that discriminations in higher animals at least do not appear to be submerged in the mere physical conditions of situations. Likewise, learned movements are manifested in a multitude of actions, the content of which is variable and the "generality" constant. A strict adherence to the notion of conditioning as it is understood by an empirical behaviorism should be able to account only for useful responses which are replicas of those produced the

first time." (SC 106, 96) But a cat which has been trained to obtain food by pulling a string may pull it with its paw on the first successful trial and with its teeth on the second. Further, if favorable attempts have been mixed with errors or useless movements, the latter will tend in some animals, to be eliminated from subsequent responses. Thus, to learn does not consist in being made capable of repeating the same gesture, but of acquiring an adapted response to the situation by different means. (Idem)

On an "objective" view or on one that will have nothing to do with "meaning," it has to be said that the appropriate response is the one gradually selected from others which also occur. But what has to be understood is how the selection takes place if no relationship of meaning exists between selected response and the satisfaction, or whatever one chooses to call the "goal." That the selection is not gradual in many cases cannot be questioned, that the comportment which becomes established (conditioned) is often objectively unlike the actual response of the original situation is also clear. For example, such is the case of a baby who after being burned reacts to a flame not by withdrawing its hand, but by acts of avoidance after one experience.

It is true that conditioned-reflex theory does not have to suppose that learning is directed only to the physical characteristics of "stimuli" or that behavior following upon such learning has to be an exact repetition of the previous

movement. But to the degree that it admits generalization of the stimulus or the response, to the degree that it accounts for the enormous flexibility of habits in the higher animals it is forced to speak in terms of structures for the organism and not in terms of physical variables. "The true stimulus is not the one definable by physics and chemistry and the reaction is not this or that particular series of movements; and the connection between the two is not the simple coincidence of two successive events." (SC 109, SB 99)

It is crucial to an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's position to realize that he does not believe that the characteristics of comportment require the positing of a psychic factor to account for them. His position merely requires that the structures to which the animal reacts and the structures of its actions need not and cannot be understood in terms of energy displacements and the re-arrangement of neurophysiological components. What Merleau-Ponty believes has been established by these criticisms is that we falsify our observations when we attempt to treat the reactions of the animal as functions of physical and individual processes and that we have precious little evidence to justify attributing a privilege of objectivity only to those functions which do seem to depend on the physical conditions.

It should be added here that in SC Merleau-Ponty limits himself at this stage of the discussion to confirming what he had argued earlier, and to describing in terms of meanings and

significations what discriminations and generalizations seem to be. He attempts to show that the structures he has been speaking of are structures of meaning only when he discusses Gestalt theory.

The question may be asked of Merleau-Ponty what then is the "stimulus" and the "response," and what is the connection between the two? To reply for him I must anticipate a great deal of what is to follow.

Physical events act on the organism by soliciting a structure (global "stimulus") which varies qualitatively when the physical events soliciting the structure vary quantitatively (within limits which may often be correlated). It would be more appropriate to say that the physical events play the role of occasions rather than of causes with respect to the body. Comportment depends on the vital significance that these global "stimuli" have for the organism rather than on the material properties of the physical events. "Hence between the variables upon which conduct actually depends and this conduct itself there appears to be an intrinsic relation. One cannot assign a moment in which physical events "act" on the organism, since the very "effect" of this "action" expresses the internal law of the body." (SC 174, SB 161)

If we anticipate what he attempts to establish in PP, his reply to the question posed above might take the following form. The corps propre actively constitutes the meaningful-represented which is the world, at the solicitation of brute

being (the unrepresented). The world is a fabric of chiaroscuro meanings which are not merely immanent to the body for the body is in active involvement with them. The active constitution of the world by the body (corps propre) takes place within the limits that the solicitations of brute being will allow and dependent upon the historical acquis of this particular corps propre. The world arises for the corps propre in reply to a "problem" posed by brute being. Perception is less a "grasping" (as expressed in the etymology of the words perceive, receive, comprehend) as an active, on-going poesis accomplished by the "genius" of the corps propre which gives the rule to its own art. The world and the space that the corps propre opens up or constitutes is not the "world" on the hither side of knowledge (brute being), nor the space of that "world," if it can be said to have one. But neither is the world the private spectacle of the corps propre, rather it is what the corps propre is involved in and towards which it is directed as is expressed in the etymology of the words "intend," "aim" (French viser).

External "stimuli" then are bundled up, so to speak, into "brute being" which may solicit the most unexpected as well as the most commonplace replies from the corps propre. What is, then, ordinarily called the response is the comportment of the corps propre adjusting itself in a meaning giving way within the world. Comportment is for Merleau-Ponty, a kind of "consciousness" viz., a knowledge in action. Hence all of

being is not "brute being," it is not a material plenum or processus en troisiéme personne, for it harbors structures of meaning. This requires further explanation which can be given only by developing the notion of the corps propre more at length. (Cf. ch. 3 supra)

Gestalt Theory

Merleau-Ponty owes so much to Gestalt psychology, particularly in his first major work, that his philosophy might appropriately be called a Gestalt philosophy. He has drawn upon this psychology more than on any other source outside philosophy proper in the elaboration of his own position. He argues, however, that the Gestaltists fail to grasp the full significance of their own discoveries. He chides Koffka for his remarks that "All our causal laws refer to events within the same universe of discourse, and therefore, since the geographical environment belongs to the universe of physics, we require that its effects [perception and comportment] belong to it also," and "I admit that in our ultimate explanations we can have but one universe of discourse and that it must be the one about which physics has taught us so much."[5]

Merleau-Ponty contends that in a philosophy which would genuinely accept the notion of Gestalt, even as it is understood in the main by Gestaltists, there could be only one universe which would be the universe of structures. "Between the different sorts of structures invested with equal rights,

between physical relations and the relations implied in the description of comportment, there could be no question of supposing any relation of derivation or of causality, nor then of demanding physical models which serve to bring into being physiological or mental structures." (SC 144, SB 133-34)
By their materialist conclusions, Merleau-Ponty believes, the Gestaltists fail to pursue their own discoveries to their most important consequences, they do not initiate an inquiry concerning the kind of being that belongs to structure, or whether the notion of structure can demand a reassessment of physicalistic postulates in psychology. If structure is precisely an indecomposable unit, if there are systems which, beyond a certain threshold, redistribute their own forces in a qualitatively different order, and express new and immanent laws, what more than a presupposition requires us to deny that a principle of discontinuity has arisen which would be inconsistent with the affirmation that all forms are "physical?"

Merleau-Ponty observes that the Gestaltists are also unfaithful to what their own orientation has revealed in so far as they do not relinquish causal explanations in dealing with comportment and perception. For example when Koehler tries to show that between pleasure and its "sensory" basis ". . . one experiences an understandable relationship,"[6] he says that the sensory basis (the coolness and taste of the beer) is the "cause" of the pleasure, just as my fright is "caused" by the violent shaking of the earth during an earthquake, or my

boredom "causes" me to get up and walk out of the restaurant. Now, boredom has a "causality" of signification or meaning like my swerving to avoid a pothole in the road; likewise, Merleau-Ponty would contend, the coolness and taste of the beer if they are in any sense distinguishable from the pleasure have a causality of signification.[7] In fact Koehler acknowledges as much, and in fact more, when he writes that the order even in physical Gestalten "rests. . . on the fact that each local event, one could almost say, 'dynamically knows' the others."[8]

It is, Merleau-Ponty says, not an accident that in order to express this presence of each moment of the Gestalt to the other, Koehler comes up with the term "knowledge."[9]

What Merleau-Ponty finds to be the decisive contribution of the notion of structure to philosophy is that it should no longer be necessary to say either that structure is a sum of its elements nor that it arises from some "supervenient" activity to synthesize "elements."[10]

Applying this philosophical principle to perception, the distinctions between sensation and perception, and between perception and knowledge, are thereby called in question. Thus, with Koehler, Merleau-Ponty advocates complete abandonment of what is called in French psychology, the <u>hypothése de constance</u>, <u>i.e.</u>, the hypothesis that the same physical events stimulating the same elements of the nervous system require the same sensations to appear, all other things being equal.

But the dismissal of this hypothesis entails the rejection of the notion of sense-data or sensation as distinct from perception, thus requiring the affirmation that perception is intrinsically charged with meaning or "intentionality."[11]

Merleau-Ponty argues this at length in the first chapters of PP where he illustrates how the criticism of the hypothése de constance if it is carried out completely takes on the force of a veritable phenomenological reduction.[12] (PP 57, PP 49) "The sensible configuration of an object or a gesture which the criticism of the constancy hypothesis brings before us, is not appropriated in some inexpressible coincidence, but is rather "grasped" through a sort of act of appropriation which we can all experience and can then express by saying that we have "found" the rabbit in the foliage of a puzzle, or that we have "caught" a slight gesture." (PP 70, PP 57)

Once the prejudice of the notion of sensation has been banished, then a face, a signature, a form of comportment, cease to be visual data whose psychological meaning is to be searched for in something inside us, whether it be coordinating brain centers or "mental" a priori. Likewise the fact of the other's being-at-the-world becomes an immediate object of experience, and like all perception charged with meaning. (Idem) Perception is prior to an "intellectual" act, and after so called "sense impressions."

Though Merleau-Ponty does not advert to it, the criticism of the hypothése de constance should also re-enforce Merleau-

Ponty's contention that physicalistic constructs in the explanation of comportment and perception are a philosophical betrayal of Gestalt insights. In particular it is misleading to say that brain events are the causal foundation of perceptual Gestalten, and it should rather be said that some of the functions of the body <u>are</u> perceptual Gestalten. This is not the same as saying that consciousness is something that happens in the brain, or to say with Koffka that consciousness is that property "which certain events in nature have of revealing themselves,"[13] as if consciousness had as objects the physiological processes which accompany it. (SC 146, SB 136)

All of this is followed up by Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the kind of "structure" that the human body (which makes perception and comportment possible) seems to be.

Footnotes to chapter two.

1. A more recent expression is that "Behaviorally, the environment is a pattern of neural energies in the central nervous system." Physical energies in the outside world "presumably" set in action those neural processes. E. C. Osgood, Method and Theory in Experimental Psychology, P. 2.

2. It is probably on the question of "generalization" that philosopies themselves differ most fundamentally (abstraction, intuition, etc.).

3. This is sufficiently accurate for it is not relevant that the photoelectric cell reacts to any instance of radiant energy of a specific type. The "reaction" of the cell is not "submerged" in the individual contents.

4. Cf. chapter III infra, p. 67

5. Koffka, F., Principles of Gestalt Psychology, p. 49. Cf. SC 144, SB 133.

6. Köhler, W., Gestalt Psychology, p. 326.

7. It should be remarked that in none of these cases does one have to reflect or "think" about what he does, and in most instances of this kind in fact one does not do so.

8. Köhler, W., Die Physiche Gestalten, p. 180

9. Those familiar with Whitehead will notice a certain affinity of Kohler's Gestalt and "dynamic knowledge," to actual occasions and prehension respectively.

10. This is not a novel insight for many philosophies. In the Aristotelian tradition it is fundamental. The burden of much of this thesis is to illustrate how Merleau-Ponty applies the insight more consistently, without turning the discussion into a direct confrontation with Aristotelian notions.

11. The term is borrowed from Husserl but Merleau-Ponty reshapes and expands it.

12. Gurwitsch supports Merleau-Ponty on this point. Cf. Field of Consciousness, p. 90-91.

13. Koffka, F., Principles of Gestalt Psychology, p. 65.

Nota bene: It is somewhat perplexing to find that Merleau-Ponty's position seems to become ambiguous on the matter of the principle of isomorphism in an essay which appeared sixteen years after SC. The essay is "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," published in The Primacy of Perception and other essays. Here he seems to agree with Koffka that structures of consciousness depend on physiological processes of the same form and constitute their causal foundation, which seems to be a capitulation to the physicalism he objected to in SC. However, what he clearly sympathizes with in Koffka's argument is that such a conception does not entail psychologism, i.e., that psychological theory reduces psychological relations to external relations of pure fact. The reason that Koffka gives for saying this is that psychological and physiological processes or rather psycho-physical processes are organized by relations that are wholly intrinsic to the Gestalt, and that therefore, ". . . psychology and logic, existence and subsistence, even to some extent reality and truth, no longer belong to entirely different realms or two universes of discourse between which no intelligible relations exists." This statement does not seem to follow from, but rather to be incompatible with a physicalistic interpretation of structure, or even with the principle of isomorphism and it is for that reason that Merleau-Ponty may have quoted it approvingly. The statement by Koffka is found in Principles of Gestalt Psychology, p. 571, quoted by Merleau-Ponty op/cit. p. 77. The French rendering is slightly different from the one I used here. Koffka was teaching at Smith College in Massachusetts when this work was published. Since there is no acknowledgment of a translator, the English version is presumably authoritative.

PART TWO

CHAPTER THREE

THE PHILOSOPHICAL NOTION OF STRUCTURE APPLIED TO THE HUMAN BODY

The General Notion of the Corps Propre

The purpose of this dissertation is to explicate Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre with special regard to perception and speech. Up to now we have stressed the opposition between his notion of structure and what tend to be physicalist psychologies. It now remains to further clarify his notion of structure applied to human perception and speech (which is one with the doctrine of the corps propre) giving more attention to its differences from what were referred to as "mentalist" views. Essentially what this means is that it should be shown how the doctrine of the corps propre accounts for human perception and speech without attributing them to an ego conceived of as "awareness" or "thought" or "that which thinks", or even exclusively to the "standard directing self." It should be added that this does not imply that Merleau-Ponty must reject the notion of a standard directing self or an ego, but that his doctrine of the corps propre must show that a "mentalist" conception of the ego tends to pay little more than lip service to the identity of this ego with one's own body.

Those who make a clear cut distinction between mind and body would not object to attributing to most men the capacity to perform meaning-giving acts. If the phrase "meaning giving

acts" applies to anything whatever, it is applicable not only to "thought" but also to speech and writing. But intellectual awareness amid detachment or "anonymity" as Merleau-Ponty often says, has long been recognized in so called automatic writings and even habit is relatively anonymous. When one's actions make sense or are logical, the logic is usually attributed to a self-conscious discursive self. But many a child's actions make sense and are logical and we may wonder whether those of a lizard do not do so as well.[1]

In the case of "subconscious" meaning-giving acts and in the striking phenomena of the "automaticisms" referred to above, there seems to be a problem as to how a kind of "knowing" or "control" can be exercised without involvement of, or without being sponsored by, what we have called the standard directing self. However, there is another perhaps more difficult problem, i.e., how the standard directing self if it is "rational," is shot through with facticity and obscurity, in a word, how it is not transparent, but opaque or embodied. Why is the exercise of pure reason so difficult if not impossible?

Merleau-Ponty argues that considerable new insight is thrown on such problems if we relinquish certain presuppositions about the nature of our perception, of our knowledge and of our bodies. If we analyze without presupposition how the body of the other is present to us in visual perception, we have no reason to assert that we see a mosaic or pattern of sensations to which we attribute desire, feelings and knowledge;

as if the body we see were given vitality by what we infer about that body from our own experience. Our experience of the other's body is not a well founded animism.

If one had to infer that the other is angry it would require (a) previous personal experience of anger and a retention of the memory of it, (b) knowledge of what one's own body looks like when one is angry, (c) knowledge of the resemblance of one's own body when angry to the other's body, (d) a syllogistic connection of (a), (b) and (c) from which it could only be surmised that the other is angry, for in (c) one cannot compare one's own body when angry with the other's body when angry unless one knows what had to be inferred. Theories of introjection identify the "other" with his private experience, the other's body with an object, and one's perception with a complex inference.

Merleau-Ponty states all of this quite compactly when he says that theories of introjection presuppose what they later try to explain, for we could not introject our feelings into the "visible behavior" unless that behavior suggested the inference.

The presence of the other's body analyzed without presupposition is not the presence of an object whose private experiences are available only by a complex mediation. It is, in fact, only by assuming an extremely artificial attitude that I can perceive the living body of another as an object. When we experience the living bodily presence of the other, we are

experiencing what Merleau-Ponty calls the corps propre.[2]

Rather than linking the body to subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty identifies them in so far as the body is a denotable instance of meaning-giving acts or comportment. We could also say that he identifies the body with subjectivity in so far as the body is a denotable subject of comportment. But then we must conceive "subject" as that which comports (to use a barbarism) and not as that which is carrier or vehicle of comportment.[3]

The corps propre, then, is that structure whose actions and perception are a unified network of motor and operant intentionalities respectively.[4]

Particular Analyses of the Corps Propre and Confirmation from Other Disciplines.

We can further elucidate the doctrine of the corps propre, first by following Merleau-Ponty's analysis of psychological theories of the "body image," and of certain pathological conditions. Then we shall show how a similar notion is at least implicitly recognized in some forms of modern lingustics. We shall also indicate very briefly how it can serve as philosophical underpinning for a theory of habit and for psychoanalysis.

The "Body Image" and the Corps Propre

At first, Merleau-Ponty says, the psychological notion of the body image was conceived of as a compendium of bodily experience, a convenient construct for a great many associated

images. It conveyed the notion that these associations were firmly established and ready to come into play at any time. Now, the purpose of the construct was to make it possible to speak of the inter-sensory and sensori-motor unity of the body. But this means that it must be a unity by right and not derivatively, a unity in principle and not the result of the association of particular "images" for it is supposed to account for their unity. The body image must be that which makes the association of images possible and hence, ". . . we have not really added anything to the atomistic explanation [one in terms of cerebral traces and recurrent sensations] unless the body image becomes the law of the constitution of coenesthesis and not its result." (PP 114, PP 99)

Nor is the body image a Gestalt in the sense given it by Konrad, i.e., ". . . knowledge of one's own body as the collective expression both of the mutual relations of its limbs and its parts,"[5] for the very notion of the body image is intended to make intelligible how it is that the body itself (and not one's knowledge or awareness of it) is a totality which takes precedence over the parts. This suggests- Merleau-Ponty believes, that the body image is not a global awareness (it is not an image) of the existing parts of the body, but a structural network of motor intentionality which is an active integrating of the limbs in proportion to their value for the organism's projects. The body image cannot be a "knowledge" in any ordinary sense of knowledge, of the position of the

members of the body as an object with respect to each other, and with respect to objects in three dimensional space. The "knowing" is rather a dynamic knowing of their availability for a task which may escape awareness altogether.

Some light thrown on the corps propre by pathology.

It is above all in departures from the regular spontaneous emergence of meaning found in pathological cases that we glimpse what our life would be if our motility and perception were a causal chain of unintentional events, or an explicit act of bestowing meaning. This accounts for the importance of pathology in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception and speech.

The unique case of Schneider[6] supplies Merleau-Ponty with a constant source of material to illustrate how one would think and act if he had to command his body, if he had to "know" what he perceived, or if he had to "know" how to move. The mentalist description of perception and action turn out to resemble the description of a pathological state. Thus, Schneider cannot understand immediately what is meant by "head of a nail." He knows what part of the object is indicated by the expression. But he has to have recourse to discursive analysis to see what one is driving at by the expression. Similarly, to understand how hearing and sight can both be called "senses," Schneider looks for a common material characteristic from which he can infer, as from a middle term, the identity of the relationship. But, as Merleau-Ponty points out, the search for a third term for comparison by the patient

is the opposite of the unmediated formation of an analogy in the normal subject. This indicates, Merleau-Ponty contends, that "Living thought, then does not consist in subsuming under some category. The category does not impose on the terms brought together a meaning external to them." (149, PP 128) In fact, the impairment of thought in Schneider is not that he is incapable of subsuming concrete data under a category, but that he can relate them only by doing so in an explicit act. In the normal subject that which is common to hearing and seeing is lived in a pre-thematic evidence before it is thought. (PP 150, PP 129) The subsuming of "data" under a category in such cases is founded on something more fundamental, i.e., the pre-thematic achievements of the corps propre. "Reasoning" is here a justification after the fact.

Merleau-Ponty points out that it has been observed how Schneider could not execute so called "abstract" or "gratuitous" movements, i.e., movements that are not related to an actual situation (or perhaps more accurately to a practical situation). Thus, he cannot point to his nose on command, unless he has time to take stock of his arm and his nose and then throw himself into the role of "moving his arm to his nose." Yet he can without hesitation take his handkerchief from his pocket and blow his nose. Neither spatiality nor coenesthesis has been affected as a thematic knowledge of spatial relations between members of the body and objects, for he can in fact take stock of them and then with an effort

assume the role. Moreover, certainly his "dynamic knowing" of the relationship of his members for a task has not been affected, for these movements appear normal or almost so. He can grasp his handkerchief to blow his nose without hesitation.

Schneider would be perfectly healthy if the body were the "knowledge of one's own body as a collective expression of the mutual relations of its limbs and its parts," for he has that knowledge. And all normal movements would be like those of Schneider when he tries to move on command, for if it is our explicit awareness which is sponsoring such acts we should have to make an effort to throw ourselves into a role, as does the amateur actor. Should it not then be concluded, Merleau-Ponty asks, that the "knowledge" characteristic of the corps propre is primarily a pre-thematic dynamic knowing, not only of the parts of the body, but of those parts with reference to the lived world?

In concrete movements Schneider has no thematic awareness of either the "stimulus" nor of his "reaction." Quite simply he is his corps propre, and his corps propre is identified with being-at-the-concrete-world. The normal corps propre is also identified with being-at-the-world but it has a far vaster domain than that of Schneider. However, this increased range is not supplied usually or necessarily by a thematic awareness. In fact when it is, the movement may well be gauche. Thus, we say that someone performs an action "self-consciously."

By having to look at his body to perform a movement on command, Schneider is like a speaker who would have to take stock of each word he uttered in order to grasp the significance of a sequence. The command has an intellectual meaning for him, but not a motor one. The command reaches his "personal existence" which is not integrated into a unified being-at-the-world. To move he has to "think about it," and even then he cannot execute the movement unless it becomes a concrete situation for him by his explicit assumption of a role with reference to it.

When the normal subject motions to a friend to approach he may of course prepare the gesture in "thought" and then make the gesture. But on what grounds could we say that the gesture itself was an effect of <u>that</u> intention? The gesture is the actual invitation. There is an artificiality in the notion that a gesture carries out a previous intention or, what amounts to the same thing, that I intend to call my friend and the gesture is the vehicle of that intention. It is already a dualistic philosophy of the body and the self, which is so much a part of our heritage and so imbedded in our language that it seems not only legitimate but almost inevitable. And thus, to say that my gesture is itself intentional, and is not the vehicle of my intention; that the utterance is its meaning, and not the overt sign of my thought; that the living body is the self and not the instrument of the self, may though trivial, sound strange.

Now, it may seem that at least the "concrete" movements of Schneider should be considered as reflexes in some traditional sense. The patient could (as he does) swat the mosquito that stings him without hesitation because of pre-established neural networks which control such a performance. But why then can the patient not tell the doctor where he is being pressed by a ruler? Between the prick of the doctor's ruler and the mosquito bite there is only a slight physical difference. The two stimuli are relatively similar, but their respective responses are radically different, and in general "concrete" movements (greifen) are possible whereas "abstract" movements (zeigen)[7] are not.

Since both zeigen and greifen employ basically the same organs and presumably most of the same nerves, the only reason, Merleau-Ponty contends, to set limits to a physiological explanation[8] (for greifen) is that otherwise the radical difference between the two types of actions would be unintelligible. The invocation of psychological causes to account for zeigen is made to measure. But it is the lack of a mediating notion between the in-itself (en soi) and the for-itself (pour soi) that forces such an interpretation for greifen and zeigen respectively; just as it forces the sundering of "bodily" functions from those that are under "conscious" control. If we relate the act of pointing (zeigen) to consciousness, if once the "stimulus" can cease to be the cause of the reaction and becomes its intentional object, then the reversion to the

notion that objectively similar acts (*greifen*) do function merely causally and that the movement is non-intentional is purely *ad hoc*. (PP 143, 123)

The distinctions between *zeigen* and *greifen*, according to Merleau-Ponty, find their expression more adequately in a comportmental dimension conceived of as being-at-the-world. The concrete actions of Schneider do not collapse into automatisms and his abstract movements are not those that call the psyche into play, rather both are irreducibly psychic and irreducibly biological, *i.e.*, they are different styles of being-at-the-world. A distinction between the two types of acts can survive without the artificiality we spoke of above, if we allow that there are several ways for consciousness to be consciousness, if we put aside the "mechanical" and the "psychic" and recognize the irreducible character of comportment. Both are different styles of human existence. (PP 145, PP 124) Such a conception enables us to clearly understand motility as a form of intentionality. "Consciousness" is not merely a matter of "I think" but of "I can." (PP 160, 139)

If this interpretation is valid then it must be said that a symbolic function characterizes all our movements, not merely the so called "abstract" ones, and the consciousness responsible for the symbolic character of most of our normal movements is pre-thematic. A gesture such as pointing contains or rather is a reference to the object, but that object is not given in a representation or a thought, rather it is that towards which *comportment* is directed.

Movement of the corps propre is not an action sponsored by reflection and is not the transporting of a physical body from one point in space to another whose representation has been formed beforehand. In order that the corps propre may move toward its object, the object must exist for it, in a space that it opens up or constitutes, which is not so much a Euclidean space in three dimensions as a certain Spielraum (champ d'action).

The myth of a consciousness which through its representations causes corresponding movements to be carried out in the body, as well as the myth of a body affecting meaning-giving acts by physiological processes blind to such meaning may then be abandoned in favor of the corps propre, whose movements are meaning-giving through and through. When the body is no longer definable in terms of meaning-giving acts it lapses into the condition of a thing. But the corps propre does not use a symbolic function to carry out its intentions, rather its movements are symbolic, its words are not signs of meanings, but are meanings.[9]

The study of a pathological case has thus, Merleau-Ponty believes, enabled him to glimpse a new mode of analysis, ". . . existential analysis, which goes beyond the traditional alternatives of empiricism and rationalism, of naturalistic explanation and introspection." (PP 158, PP 136)

Linguistics.

Further substantiation of Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the

corps propre seems to be provided by a new approach to linguistics by certain authors such as Noam Chomsky, Jerrold Katz, Jerry Fodor, and Benjamin Whorf.

We said above that according to Merleau-Ponty consciousness is not merely a matter of "I think" but of "I can."[10] To say that we follow grammatical rules in speaking cannot mean that we know these rules explicitly while we are speaking, and if we have not studied grammar we need not "know" them at all in order to speak.[11]

This is brought out by Jerrold Katz in an entirely different context than our talk about intentionality, when he recognizes that "a semantic theory of a natural language has as its goal the construction of a system of rules which represent what a fluent speaker knows about the semantic structure of his language that permits him to understand its sentences."[12] To the question in what way can it be said that the speaker knows these structures, Katz replies ". . . the fluent speaker has acquired the means necessary for performing a task, whose character compels us to admit that its performance results from the application of rules."[13] Among the facts which compel this admission is that we understand sentences that we have never seen before without the slightest difficulty, and in fact in a limited life-time the speaker can encounter only a minute number of the different kinds of sentences that he could understand. The idea of the enormity of this number is conveyed by the fact that presumably any fluent speaker can

understand any twenty word sentence, but the number of twenty word sentences in English, for example, is 10^{30}, while the number of seconds in a century is only 3.15×10^{9}.[14]

Whorf seems even closer to Merleau-Ponty when he says that in linguistic phenomena significant behavior ". . . or what is the same, both behavior and significance so far as interlinked, are ruled by a specific system or organization, a 'geometry' of form-principles characteristic of each language."[15] Enlarging upon this, Whorf says that "It is as if the personal mind, [what Merleau-Ponty calls reflection] which selects words but is largely oblivious to pattern, were in the grip of a higher far more intellectual mind which has very little notion of houses and beds and soup kettles, but can systematize and mathematize on a scale and scope that no mathematician of the schools ever remotely approached."[16]

To reply to all this that physical events too proceed according to intricate laws (and in that respect are no different) would be to reject the criticisms of the first part of this dissertation. Only what happens always or for the most part can be the object of science (can be lawful or law-like) as Aristotle had observed. But the fact that four thousand nine hundred and ninety individuals out of five thousand will use the same basic structures in expressing themselves does not mean that they obey scientific laws, at least not if "scientific laws" is taken in some univocal sense. For in the first place the "elements" or "variables" of language and of

comportment generally are not "positive" entities or "items" but meanings which like the Gestalt figure on a ground might be said to have a nucleus and a fringe. In the second place the grammatical structures of language (and the "rules" of comportment generally) are not decided upon once and for all, but vary historically both in the individual culture and in the individual.

Habit

Since the healthy and mature organism does not merely repeat its previous actions, but has the ability to respond with a certain style of solution to problems of a general form, Merleau-Ponty believes it is extremely odd to continue to assert that habit is a matter of the organism's knitting individual movements and stimuli into fixed neural pathways. Equally unsatisfying is the type of "mentalist" solution which sees the origin of habit in an act of understanding which actively organizes the neural pathways and then retires aside as it were, leaving the residue of a former intellectual activity.

The doctrine of the corps propre allows us to say that the body itself understands in its movements. "The cultivation of a habit is indeed the grasping of a significance, but it is the motor grasping of a motor significance." (PP 167-143) A habit is a skilled mode of being-at-the-world. For the motorist to get used to a car, for the blind man to get used to a stick is for them to incorporate these movements into

the corps propre. Habit is both a form of "knowledge" and an "involuntary" action, but it is also not a third person process. It possesses both the symbolic and anonymous character that we have seen Merleau-Ponty ascribe to some comportment; not the symbolic character of reflection, nor the anonymous character of a reflex circuit.

Psychoanalysis.

It is, I think, quite clear how the doctrine of the corps propre could provide a philosophical base for psychoanalysis disentangling it from its mechanistic origins in Freud. A re-interpreted psychoanalysis would in turn provide a vast range for the implementation of the doctrine of the corps propre.

Repression might be seen as entering upon a course of action with an impossible future in the relatively anonymous manner of the corps propre. One continues, for example, to live in the parental world. The content of other emotions does not succeed in altering this basic structure, and one finally forgoes the possibility of being fully and freely at-the world. Authentically new emotions have not been assimilated into the corps propre, and in a sense it is only the old ones that have been repeated. To develop a fixed and inflexible style or modality of being-at-the world would be to cease to grow. None of this need be explicitly conscious. The privileged world of the neurotic becomes "thin," "insubstantial," or "inauthentic," all ways of saying that one's modality

of being-at-the-world is far too restricted for the individual to function freely and constructively. One's modality of being-at-the-world can become finally "nothing more than a certain dread," (PP 98-99, PP 83) On this view to seek for the "etiology" of a neurosis is not to look for a cause but for the style of existence which has become fixed, and for the motives which account for the fixation. The Oedipus complex is not a cause, but a style of existence which may become an overly dominant modality of comportment with regard to others.

A Problem

The corps propre may seem to have been identified by Merleau-Ponty with an a-personal existence functioning by a logic of its own. Merleau-Ponty nowhere denies, and we may assume that it would be preposterous to do so, that there is also a personal existence, the first person modality of being-at-the-world. Does the dualism between the psychic and the biological, which he purported to have overcome, re-emerge between the corps propre and the one who can reflect that this corps propre is his?

There are some statements that seem to imply such a position. For example, he says, "There is then another subject beneath the I, for whom a world exists before I am there, who marked out a place for me in it." (PP 294, PP 254) It is then not inaccurate to say that the notion of existence in Merleau-Ponty is the conception that "underneath my conscious

I there is a pre-conscious I, a body-subject."[17] However, most of Merleau-Ponty's statements are much less equivocal than this seems to indicate. In the sentence preceeding the one just quoted, Merleau-Ponty says, ". . . my personal existence must be the re-taking up (reprise) of a pre-personal tradition." (Idem.) His statement here indicates continuity and not rupture. His general position is clearly expressed when he says "Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence, which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts." (PP 104, PP88) Even the most personal acts, and reflection itself, however, do not fully escape the "strictures" of being acts of the corps propre. This will be brought out in chapter six infra.

When Merleau-Ponty says that the conscious I is rooted in sexuality, in space and time, etc., he means that the I never emerges completely from them, and that the pre-articulate domain of the self is part of a unity that is the total self. The total corps propre is not this thinking self plus the pre-personal domain, but indissoluably one and the other. If we say that the fond of the corps propre is the original structure which is the body as modified by personal and anonymous acts (a vast array of acquisitions), we must allow that the individual self speaks and perceives with his fond as much as with the present immediate "givens." And just as there is no way to adequately disentangle what comes from the fond and

what comes from the present encounter, so too there is no way to clearly disengage what is a truly "personal" act, from one that is laden with the pre-personal. One is tempted to say that we never really know what we are doing, but the temptation comes from expecting too much.[18]

This is the philosophical root of Merleau-Ponty's "relativism." Evidence for him is not that which grounds a truth absolutely and universally, but rather one which reliably does so for a determinate realm and for a determinate time. "Once I get into it, once I enter into a certain order of thinking, whether e.g., Euclidean space or the existential conditions of this or that society, I find evidences. Yet these evidences are not irrevocable, for this space and this society are not the only ones possible." What we call certitude then, is what is established "until further notice." (PP 454, PP 396) We will be brought back to this problem particularly in chapter seven infra.

Footnotes for chapter three

1. Even the Schoolmen of the middle ages considered animal habits as cognitive in actu exercito, which without violence could be translated as cognitive in actual exercise. Only to men did they grant cognition in actu signato i.e., in the formal and most proper sense.

2. The need for a special term to refer to the body in its average living presence is due to the identification of the term "body" in most languages with what is distinct from the source of meaning-giving acts, which makes it seem that only by poetic license or in humor might one say that a body speaks.

3. The corps propre as "that which comports" has great affinity to Aristotle's notion of hypokeimenon, and to the Scholastic's hypostasis. Merleau Ponty rarely calls the corps propre a subject and this is perhaps due to his antagonism towards "hypostatizing." His reluctance on this point is akin to what I think is a common opinion, namely, that Aristotle's hypokeimenon and the Scholastic hypostasis cannot be understood as processes. I do not share this view, but cannot here attempt to justify my stand. However, I would like to remark that when I use the term "subject" I do not intend, nor does Merleau-Ponty when he uses "corps propre," a static substantia or even "nature" considered as the source of action which is other than the action itself. Rather subject and corps propre signify natura (future participle of nascor)--that which is about to bring forth out of its historical fund, or better natura naturans -- that which is bringing forth while about to bring forth further.

4. According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's originality lies not in the discovery of the intrinsic intentionality of consciousness, rather it is the discovery "beneath intentionality of representations, of a deeper intentionality (fungierende Intentionalität) which others have called existence. (PP 141, PP 121 footnote)

5. Konrad, Das Körperschema, eine kritische Studie und der Versuch einer Revision, pp. 365-367. Quoted by Merleau-Ponty (PP 116, PP 100).

6. Schneider was injured in the "occipital zone" by a fragment of shrapnel during WW I. He was studied extensively by Gelb, Goldstein and others.

7. These movements are referred to respectively as greifen and zeigen by Gelb and Goldstein. Cf. particularly Goldstein, "Zeigen und Greifen," Nervenarzt p. 449-450 (1933).

8. As Goldstein tends to do, though he seems to modify his view later on in the same work. (Cf. PP 144, PP 123)

9. Cf. Chapter six infra.

10. Piaget concurs in this when he says that the logic of the individual is above all an operatory system. (Cf. Child Development, p. 174) Why then call it a logic at all? Because systematic logic grows out of the operant system and probably never wholly leaves it. At the limit there is the uninterpreted calculus in the logician which is not absolutely devoid of intentionality. "Symbolic logic" in the digital computer lapses into the condition of a thing.

11. This seems to imply that Wittgenstein also recognizes a non-thematic or operant intetionality in his contention that language is like a game. When we play the game, we cannot reflect on the rules.

12. Katz, J. J., The Structure of Language, Readings in the Philosophy of Language, p. 520-21.

13. Idem p. 500, footnote

14. Idem.

15. Whorf, Benjamin, Language, Thought and Reality, p. 257.

16. Idem.

17. Kocklemans, J. A. "Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Language," Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, Vol. II, no. 1 (1963).

18. Carl Hempel points out that experiments designed to test an empirical theory of rational action developed by Davidson, Suppes and Siegel, seem to indicate that there is a "type of conscious planning which is non-consciously rational in the sense of maximizing expected utility with quantitative precision." (Cf. Hempel, Carl, Rational Action p. 15 and unpublished paper.) It is, I think, significant that such results are anything but paradoxical within the doctrine of the corps propre.

PART THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CORPS PROPRE AS PERCEIVING

In the present chapter I will first offer a very brief survey and criticism of the kinds of analyses of perception which Merleau-Ponty considers deficient or misleading. This is followed by an outline of genetic analysis with which Merleau-Ponty replaces such analyses (which implicitly or explicitly use the matter-form schema--the binominal formula).[1] I will highlight the relevance for philosophy of his analysis as I present it.

Analyses of perception according to the binominal formula.

Merleau-Ponty contends that empiricism and intellectualism (by and large the epistemological counterparts of what we have called physicalism and mentalism) tend to give autonomous character to either matter or form or both. The terms used for matter and form vary, but the basic notion is in some sense the same. Empiricism tends to reduce form to contents, intellectualism tends to retain contents, but under supervenient or autonomous form.

One might analyze perception by saying that sensations (in whatever manner these be conceived--impressions, the manifold, hyletic data) are synthesized (in whatever manner this be conceived--gentle force of habit, the a priori, noetic activity). The sensations are the matter which are synthesized by form. It is as if our "immediate" sensations are altered

by finally actually being perceived. Perceiving, then, might be called a kind of constant interpretation of "immediate sensations" which we never see.

But if perception in the case of vision, for example, were an interpretation, it would not be a case of merely seeing in some wholly straightforward sense, but the seeing of x as y--the sensation in interpreted form. As we said above, we never in fact see x. Yet on the binominal view it must be assumed to be not only a "factor" in our seeing, but also prior, more basic and if we could get at it without the screen of form, perhaps more real, or perhaps clearer.

If we examine it, we see that the probable source of the "see as" is the opposite of what such an analysis makes of it. Only with an effort can I see a dinner plate that is inclined to my line of sight as an elliptical shape. It then seems paradoxical that I first see it round. But it is the "see as" which has created the paradox. It is in fact singularly strange that from the fact that we can see perceptions as more basic so-called sensations, the conclusion has been arrived at that what we ordinarily see is "sensations" as perceptions. But this is what encourages us to believe that "white ellipse" is more elemental and maybe even closer to reality than "round plate."[1]

According to Merleau-Ponty if we revive our original communion with the world, both "sensations" and "interpretations" lose their apparent constitutive value and are seen for what

they are--limiting notions hypostatized as "factors."

Gestalt theory, he observes, has brought out clearly that the so called "signs" of distance are known only in reflective perception. That is, I can notice on reflection that my hand at twelve inches from my eyes "looks" as large as the door at fifteen feet. But I do not go through a kind of inference to perceive the constancy of the size of the door (perhaps ten feet by four feet). If the "signs" of distance are reasons for my perceiving as I do, they cannot be of the order of explicit thought. In fact it is because of this difficulty that Gestalt psychology contends that these "signs" must be "causes."

What is not clear is the sense we may give to these "reasons" or "causes." We cannot refuse to allow that marginal perception does play a part in perceiving distance, for when intervening objects are hidden by a reduction screen the perceived distance shrinks. We are already familiar with the new language that Merleau-Ponty believes must be forged to deal with these processes. Perception is achieved by the anonymous operant intentionality of the corps propre. Marginal perception (objects intervening between the corps propre and the distant object, or a screen) "motivate" perceiving greater or lesser distance, ". . . interposed objects in the natural context "mean" a greater distance." (PP 60, PP 48) Gestalt psychology has emphasized the unperceived tensions in the visual field, but these tensions are "known" unreflectively in

perceiving. They establish our perceiving by a worldless logic.

But to understand the perceiving of distance also requires a new notion of extension which is not that of partes extra partes. (PP 61, 49) Not only is the Helmholtzian model for the explanation of visual constancy defective because it does not supply a theory of subjectivity by which "calculations" can be made, it also requires that our "representation" as such have some definite en soi dimension; otherwise there would be incommensurability between partes extra partes i.e., the actual distance from me to the object, and my calculations of this distance relative to a non-determined size of my representation.

What is most decisive however, against the binominal formula in the analysis of perception is a discovery of Gestalt psychology. That a figure on a ground is the simplest "sense-datum" available to us, Merleau-Ponty contends, is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception allowing us therefore to bring in the notion of non-structured sensations in either a scientific or philosophical analysis. That nothing can be perceived except as a figure on a ground ". . . is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be a perception at all." (PP 10, PP 4)

Gestalten however are not just there outside waiting for us to "grasp" them. We cannot imagine what the units of brute

being may be except by imagining them as represented, and it is necessary to say that as represented they are first constituted in perception. Perception is that whereby there are Gestalten or represented units, in a word, that whereby there are images and hence that whereby there are "elements" which can be associated. Hence to say that perception synthesizes something more primordial is conjecture founded on an acquisition made possible by perception.

Moreover, since Gestalten are there only for what can constitute them, i.e., for a consciousness, they are, to use Husserl's term "intentional." For there to be a Gestalt is for there to be something for someone. To perceive a Gestalt, to see that it has an "outline" which does not "belong" to the background and which "stands out" from it; to see that it is "stable" and that the background has no precise bounds, describes the Gestalt in anthropomorphic terms and that is why it is accurate, for a perception without meaning would not be a perception. In the field of perception everything counts for everything else by a non-thematic or operant intentionality, and it is more appropriate to ask what a percept means than to ask what it is.

It may seem that the world itself, on this analysis, is replaced by the world-as-meaning which would be akind of idealism. In the following chapter I present Merleau-Ponty's reasons for denying that this is so. Suffice it to say for now that what things mean is also what they are, for to be

in a world (or to commune with the world as we may also say) is indistinguishable from perceiving. The world-as-meaning tout court exists for reflection but depends on the existentially constituted world i.e., the world that is always there in perception. In ordinary wakeful awareness I do not reflect, I do not think the world, but I am at-the-world, a world which is nevertheless intentional through and through. To return to the things themselves is to return to this world, the one that precedes knowledge and of which knowledge speaks. (PP iii, PP ix)

Genetic Analysis of Perception

An effective replacement for the binominal formula analysis, Merleau-Ponty believes, is the view that between perceptual "contents" and their "form," between "constituents" of whatever nature and their "binding energy," there is not the relation of factor to factor, but as Husserl said, of the founding to the founded. Merleau-Ponty takes this to mean that ". . . form integrates within itself the content until the latter finally appears as a mere mode of form itself." (PP 147-147, PP 127) Standing alone such a succinct expression of the genetic formula is misleading because it implies that "contents" are reduced to form, and then form would be autonomous. The genetic formula expressed in binominal terms will always appear contradictory, just as to speak of a Gestalt as having parts seems to involve contradictions.[3]

In visual perception the "contents" of the Gestalt are

given only in and through the Gestalt, but the Gestalt itself is given only in and through the "contents." It is in fact only in reflection that a distinction can be made between them. We could say that in normal perception the concrete essense is immediately recognizable, and its "properties" appear only through that essence. (PP 153, PP 131) It is such a perceiving (a temporal tissue of intentions) with which genetic analysis of perception is concerned. The analysis must attempt to bring out the concrete and the general in such intentions, for that is the only way that some relationship can be found among them.[4]

It could be argued that the relationship between the concrete and the general is another instance of matter and form, but it is not, for the general is identified with the concrete in any instance of the general, which is illustrated by the fact that the traditional uses of the terms "matter" and "form" do not apply to "particular men" and "man" respectively.

Neither Merleau-Ponty nor anyone else could begin a genetic analysis of perception beginning with some sort of primordial experience. What he does is to analyze nascent perception (Cf. infra) and the perception of "objects;" and to complete the analysis he has to show how scientific objects "break away" from perception. This is of course a collosal undertaking. All I can do here is give a rough outline of a kind of ontogenetic analysis that Merleau-Ponty

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makes of perception. This is enough to illustrate how perception is treated from within the doctrine of the corps propre. It will thus further establish my central claim, that the doctrine of the corps propre enables us to speak of perception in a manner which avoids mentalism and physicalism.

Nascent Perception

Present perceptions cannot be disentangled from the vast wake of one's past, and one's very language will limit enormously what one will be able to say of it, or even see in it. So though one must start from where he is he can remember and now notice that perceiving involves a vital communication with the world which has been the familiar setting of his life.

The relatively unsophisticated perception of the child, of the pre-literate and for the most part of the literate adult, we may call nascent perception. It is primarily directed toward persons, artifacts and items of use. At this level of perception one sees a person, not an object that moves or thinks; one sees a hammer and not a piece of metal and wood which at the limit would be (if we could see them) a congeries of sub-things e.g., atoms. The adult and presumably the very young child perceives a smile without adverting to the color of the lips or even the lips. From the child's comportment it may reasonably be assumed that it perceives the attitude of a face or the meaning of a gesture without being able to fully "descriminate" heads or hands. In a conversation, "morphemes" are not heard and interpreted as meaningful expressions, but

utterances are perceived. In fact only trained linguists can discriminate, i.e., truly hear, morphemes. It is when a tool breaks down that it becomes conspicuous as made of components. Likewise, for the unphilosophically minded only when utilia such as shoes, wine glasses and watches are placed in settings of nature and their involvement with human reality is somewhat ruptured or diminished that they begin to take on the character of "objects." Surrealism has employed this device to intrigue or shock everyday perception.

These few examples already clearly suggest that nascent perception has little or nothing to do with what a reflective analysis could call knowledge of objects. They also illustrate how nascent perception has nothing whatever to do with synthesizing of "impressions" or "sense-data" under concepts. Nascent perception rather seems to be a living communion with a human world, an opaque form of knowing whose structures nevertheless possess a practical lucidity, so much so that the "references" of such a knowing are usually quite unambiguous no matter how problematic they may become for reflection. Thus, the playing field is not an "object" for the football player in the sense of an ideal term which can give rise to an indefinite multiplicity of perspectival views, but which remains the same under "apparent" transformations. For him the field is rather the rapidly shifting term of practical intentions. The yard lines, the off-sides markings, the goal, are present to him as immediately and non-thematically as the

horizontal and vertical planes of his own body.

All of this says more than that nascent perception opens on a reality which solicits our action, rather than on a truth (an object of knowledge) which solicits our contemplation. It also says that the corps propre is the absolute beginning of perception. The Gestalten of nascent perception are not that without which meaning would not be possible, they are the very appearance of meaning, they are the birth of norms and not realized according to pre-established norms. The precise, immediate rules of the art of playing the game, when to pivot, to dodge, to lunge, are changing kaleidescopically at every succeeding instant. The corps propre is like the genius[5] of Kant's Critique of Judgment; it is or has the natural gift or talent which gives the rule to its being-at-the-world.[6]

The Perceived Object

Merleau-Ponty points out that visual experience is the possession of a visual field in which richness and clarity (generality and particularity) are in inverse proportion to each other. Either of these taken separately seems theoretically capable of being carried to an asymptotic limit, and analysis seems to indicate that they must be "brought together" the universal applied to the particular. But they are always already "brought together" in the culmination and balance of the perceptual process. Experience of an object is full co-existence with a particular phenomenon at the moment when the particular phenomenon is a segmentable portion of

the visual field to which I can assign a name. It is in fact after a portion of the visual field is segmented, and named and its relationships to other segments of the visual field are actively adverted to, that it begins to take on the value of what is appropriately called an object.

It may be important to point out that Merleau-Ponty is not saying that there are no objects, but that to see the aspect "object" of an object is rather a rare occurrence. Some philosophers have argued that one cannot see an object, but can only think it. For them what we see are properties of objects. As Merleau-Ponty points out, if it is thought that all aspects of the object have some relationships to every other aspect of every other object in the visual field; if it is presumed that the object has an infinity of relations, a kind of total "appearance," we then have the notion of the thing-in-itself. But objects are not given in perception as the presumptive asymptotic term of an indefinite multiplicity of relations. Rather they are given to the individual according to the conditions of his fond or personal background and as a present inception of a total examination which can never be completed. The object then, it may also be said, is not given in perception, but taken up in perceiving, i.e., to see an object is to take up (reprise) a theme which unfolds before us. Only as an unconditioned limit of this perceiving may we speak of objects-in-themselves.

Naming of course tends to reify the themes of perception.

We have said that nascent perception (pre-predicative or non-thematic perception) has a certain practical lucidity. The opacity of the themes of experience begins when we advert to the names that we give certain practical segments, and is overwhelming when we try to define them. The color of a table, for example, retains a practical lucidity and constancy for nascent perception despite the changes in lighting and in spite of every change in my position with respect to the table. It is only after the color is named, when we say that the table is white that we begin to think that it has a wholly determinate "objective" color. In fact naming colors can affect our presumed perception of color to such an extent that we may think that we can see only what we can name, and inversely that if we can name a host of colors we must perceive on a broader range. The Maoris have 3,000 names for colors not because they perceive more colors than we do, but because their classification of colors includes the structural configuration of the object with what we call color. A Maori would be perplexed at our apparent naivete in saying that the table was "white" if we also said that their sacred heron was white. A Standard Average European would no doubt say it is white, even though it is surely not the white of polished enamel.

It seems then, that it is through speech about the perceived that the perceived begins to take on the object character that philosophy and science speak of so frequently. In this manner

the bringing of a pre-articulate meaning structure (or perceptual intention) to utterance has a tendency to remove it from its inherence in the existential meaning. Only in reflection or in speech are the six sides of a cube made explicit, and at the limit, as geometrical signification does the cube have six perfectly equal sides. In perception on the other hand the cube is given perspectivally, and its sides are given only through time, moreover they cannot be equal in the same sense as the cube one defines, otherwise we would not see a cube.

This illustrates why for Merleau-Ponty the distinction between sensibility and intelligence, between matter and form, between the particular and the universal is replaced by the lived and the spoken, the existential and the thematic, or as we have also said, nascent perception and the perception of objects. Hence too, the problems of the relations between "stimuli" and "interpretation," between "sensations" and "intellection," between "hyletic data" and "meaning giving acts," respectively are problems of the relations of "consciousness as flux of individual events in their haecceity, of concrete and resistant structures to those of consciousness as tissue of [thematic] <u>significations</u>." (SC 232, SB 215)

Because the corps propre is my mode of access to the world, first on the level of perception and gradually and without discernable limits on the level of explicit signification, the problem which Leibnitz tried to resolve by pre-established harmony is carried over into human consciousness. It is now

a question of understanding the relation of the profiles of things, of their perspectives, to the significations of those things which are intended through them. (SC 237, SB 220) Moreover, "The unity of the thing beyond all its fixed properties is not a substratum, a vacant x. . . . but that unique accent which is found in each of them, the unique manner of existing of which they [significations] are a second order expression." (PP 369, PP 319)

It may be said, Merleau-Ponty contends, that the corps propre perceives what are ordinarily called objects in philosophy as it does comportment, for the object and the person pervade their momentary manifestations and are not "behind" them. The meaning of the ash-tray for the corps propre in perception is not a certain idea which co-ordinates sensory aspects and is accessible to intelligence only, but is a characteristic manner in which a certain presence relates to my corps propre, and which if I want to I may signify with a gesture, with a single explosion on my lips or elaborate into an essay or a painting.

The matter and form schema which requires a synthesis of the manifold under concepts would sever the ties which bind the corps propre's perceptions to the corps propre, and then sensible qualities would become what I perceive and it would be possible for me only to think the object. Corps propre percepts of a certain stability may or may not be clearly signifiable and are in any case given rather as themes than as

substances or concepts. The movement of the corps propre around one of these themes does not change them, for they possess a unity of style and are not the sum of successive profiles taken individually.

Such an analysis of perception restores the lived world. That is why we say that in perception the "things" are given to us in person or in the flesh. But this means that these "things" are correlative to my corps propre or to my existence. The "thing" is not first of all a meaning for the understanding, but a "meaning" for the corps propre.

Now, if such an analysis is at least basically correct, it is an error for psychology to try to find where the perceived comes from and what the body must <u>be</u> in order to elaborate it. Perception would become reified, and then the problem would become one of finding how an "image" could arise which fits the world outside conceived as already segmented. It may seem that at least parts of such problems can be solved, for example by finding correlations between certain radiant energies and one's perception of certain colors under given conditions. Such investigations, as significant as they are for certain purposes, do not begin to explain perceiving which is not an event so much as an involvement in events. Perhaps this can be brought out by an example. A digital computer could be connected to a graphic plotter, and the "images" that such a device would form could by analogy be said to be like perceptual images. But the perceiving of a thing cannot be understood by explaining its action on me, as one could explain

the formation of the "image" on the plotter by the action of the data fed into the computer. Rather I understand what it is for me to perceive by understanding what it is for me to be about the world, by understanding what it is for me to be involved in it. If anything it should be said that brute being "acts" on me by offering me an occasion for meaning.

The Scientific Object

A satisfactory discussion of the scientific object or construct would require at least a fairly thoroughgoing philosophy of science. The following can only be a brief remark about one of the problems that the philosopher of science may concern himself with, viz., the source of the scientific object in perception, and the relationship of the scientific object to the corps propre.

The meanings constituted by the corps propre in perception are the things themselves, what one is involved in directly -- not the en soi or brute being. The significations constituted by science, on the other hand, are not the things themselves, but a refined meaning which has been given to them. The elements of the astronomer's sky are not related to each other except to the extent that known laws explicitly and thematically say they are, whereas all things in the perceptual field of the corps propre are related to all the others, they count for each other non-thematically. (PP 246, PP 215) When I see a thing there is always more to be seen; when I signify a thing, it is by definition wholly constituted.

In perceiving I discover an import in things without having endowed them with it through a thematic constituting operation and the epistemological gap between the inside and the outside is bridged by the corps propre in perceiving because to the extent that I perceive I am at the world and involved in it as will be brought out in the following chapter.

Not so in the elaboration of the scientific object which depends on my thematic constituting capacity and "rules of correspondence" to link my signification to the world. Hence, too, the scientific object in general requires far more involvement of the standard conscious self than of the "anonymous layer" of the corps propre. In a sense perceiving happens to me, which is to say that there is a kind of de-personalization in perceiving at least relative to the more personal character of self-conscious acts.

Merleau-Ponty agrees basically with Husserl that the scientific object is forged by a free variation of certain facts in imagination, and is not an induction in the sense of finding what is common to particulars. The scientific object is, to translate Husserl's term "Wesenshau," an insight into essence, i.e., into that which remains invariant throughout the free variation in imagination.[7] Galileo used the notion of free fall which is never found in our natural surroundings to construct the laws of falling bodies. One calls an action labile in psychology when an action is too rigid and when it is too flexible, i.e., when they have nothing in common except

that they are not "centered."

An insight into essence, however, is the making explicit or clarification of something concretely experienced. Hence a recognition that the essence comes from something else from which it starts is essential to its nature. That it follows upon a more direct contact with the things themselves is enclosed in its very meaning. In a word the relation between perception and the scientific object is one of founding, i.e., perception serves as the ground on which insight into essence is formed.[9] Hence if one cannot work out a "sense of examples" to illustrate it it is no insight.

Some of this "forging" can be spurious of course, as phlogiston turned out to be. And in general, Merleau-Ponty contends, it is possible for me to believe that I have grasped an essence when in fact it is merely a concept rooted in language, a prejudice whose apparent coherence reduces merely to the fact that I have become used to it. He suggests that the best way of guarding against this danger would be to admit that "though a knowledge of facts is never sufficient for grasping an essence and though the construction of idealizing fictions with foundation in reality is always necessary, I can never be sure that my insight into essence is anything more than a prejudice rooted in language--if it does not enable me to hold together all the facts which are known and which may be brought into relation with it."[10] In this he differs somewhat from Husserl.

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Footnotes for chapter four.

1. This is Whorf's phrase to designate the matter-form schema. Op. cit., p. 147.

2. Bronaugh, Richard N., "The Argument from the Elliptical Penny" Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 14 (1964) p. 151.

3. It is, I think, worthy of note that the notion of matter and form is expressed genetically in the Hopi language. The Hopi does not seem to think of things but of events, and the preparing or preparedness of an event corresponds to "matter" or "stuff" in Standard Average European thinking. (Cf. Whorf, Op. cit. p. 147-48 also p. 138) Their metaphysics apparently would be a metaphysics of process.

4. It would not be inaccurate to compare Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception to a kind of grammar of the perceptual field of consciousness. The "context" is the field of consciousness and Gestalten are the sentences, or words. To ask what a Gestalt means is to ask how it is related by operant intentionality to the rest of the field of consciousness. Perhaps a better way to characterize it would be to say that his analysis of perception is a hermeneutic (literary interpretation) of the text which is the field of consciousness. A philosophical analysis would attempt to find the general structures according to which instances of perception could be understood. Merleau-Ponty however does not supply us with a theory of the rules for interpreting the field of consciousness. His main purpose is to bring out how sophisticated perception arises out of and never really leaves everyday experience. The former is founded on the latter. To use the example of hermeneutics again, everyday perception is like the average understanding of a text, sophisticated perception is like the "critical" understanding of the "same" text. Strictly speaking there is no "same" text, for every reading is done by an individual with his particular fond.

5. Kant, I. Critique of Judgment, Paragraph 46.

6. This is particularly conspicuous in the case of spatial references, up, down, top, bottom, which are constituted by the corps propre. Cf. chapter on Space. (PP 293, 254).

7. Merleau-Ponty, M. "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," Primacy of Perception and other Essays, p. 70.

8. Idem, p. 71

9. Idem, p. 68.

10. Merleau-Ponty, op cit., p. 75

CHAPTER FIVE

MERLEAU-PONTY'S EXISTENTIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

A New Transcendental Aesthetic

In the last chapter attention was directed to the kind of analysis of perception which Merleau-Ponty believes may replace the traditional one based on the binominal formula, but the philosophical import of his analysis was not brought out explicitly. The main theme of this chapter will be to describe the basic epistemological conclusions that seem to be required by a genetic analysis of perception. This will further illustrate how perception is an achievement of the corps propre, and not of an intellectual consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty's grasp of the epistemological consequences of granting the founding term (what we have called nascent perception)[1] little or no philosophical status is perhaps decisive for his whole philosophy. For Merleau-Ponty the latent presuppositions of traditional transcendental philosophy always keep it on the verge of idealism, and involve the conception of consciousness as wholly transparent. When consciousness is confused it is due to the "senses" or the intractability of the matter or content, and not to the constituting activity of consciousness.

On the other hand traditional transcendental philosophy in so far as it accepts the noumenon-phenomenon distinction gives in to the common sense conviction that there are things-in-themselves.

What Merleau-Ponty believes is behind all this is that in defining the conditions for the possibility of experience, critical philosophy presupposes what the world is, i.e., a world in which science is possible. This becomes the presupposition that what is is scientifically intelligible. In the world thus defined by critical philosophy dynamic relations (causal), characterize the relationship between events, and consonant with such a view the living body must take its place as a part of the real world of experience, as a part of the system. Comportment becomes a third person process and is re-translated into objective movements. The carrier of such comportment is a body which is not a self, but an active locale of extraordinary physico-chemical transformations. The body of the other is also an object and my only source of contact with him. Finally, only a searching critical philosophy even concerns itself with the one for-itself which remains, the scientist (in general?), a kind of universal constituting consciousness. The empirical self, each individual self, has little or no philosophical status in such a system. All of this seems to follow from the presupposition that the world of experience is an objective universe. This is an instance of what Merleau-Ponty calls the prejugé du monde.

But it is not the same thing to give the conditions for the possibility of experiencing such a world, and to give us the conditions for the possibility of experience, of human being-at-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty the constitution of the

world is not achieved by thought, by the intellectual ego, but by the corps propre, and what is given in one's immediate presence appears on the background of an indefinite world. The corps propre is, as it were, an extremely intricate "science" constituting a world in which it lives, which it "haunts" as Merleau-Ponty often says.

It was Husserl who taught Merleau-Ponty to avoid the prejugé du monde, and made him see that the task of a radical reflection (a complete critique), that is, of one which wishes to truly understand itself, consists paradoxically in a rediscovery of the unreflected experience of the world. Such a reflection would have as one of its consequences to realize how and why the objective knowledge of intellectualism is merely one possibility of human existence.

Merleau-Ponty points out that in Ideen II, Husserl speaks of the pure knower who attempts to grasp things without residue. There Husserl also recognizes that this form of objectification or intellectual possession is a purely theoretical attitude. It is the attitude of the philosopher of science, an attitude which goes back to a pure I and its correlative, blosse Sachen. What is of particular interest to Merleau-Ponty is that "from Ideen II on, Husserl's reflections escape this tete-a-tete between pure subject and pure things. They look deeper down for the fundamental."[2] The domain of the prearticulate[3] is for Merleau-Ponty this fundamental. To go back to the things themselves, he contends, is to return to the

world before knowledge i.e., to that which in every scientific specification becomes abstract, and upon which science depends. (PP iii, PP ix)

Now, the world of our experience is a solid tissue that does not await our judgment for us to "assent" pre-thematically to phenomena no matter how strange, and inversely gives no credence to our daydreams no matter how coherent or common. Perception is not a deliberate act, it is not a rapid calculation and the perceived is already there before any intellectual act. In fact I can reflect only if there is already something there for me to reflect upon.

Reflection of the Kantian sort, Merleau-Ponty argues, purports to begin with our experience of the world and to go back to the conditions for the possibility of that experience. But instead of remaining faithful to experience Kant substitutes a re-construction of what it must be. Kant makes it appear that the universal synthesis is that without which there would be no world of experience. These syntheses however are of the order of judgments, whereas perception is not. (PP lv, PP x) It may be that scientific objects are made possible by the categories, and that the knowledge of these objects is de jure valid because they cannot be thought otherwise. But this does not apply to perception. My awareness of the world is not the certitude of my thought of the world and the world is not first of all the world as meant in an intellectual act, but the world as lived in perception. The

conditions for the possibility of living a world can be discovered, Merleau-Ponty contends, only by a radical reflection on our actual experience.

The crucial significance for Merleau-Ponty of Husserl's reduction is that it makes such a reflection possible. It is precisely because we are being-at-the-world that a radical reflection requires us to suspend our involvement. According to Merleau-Ponty the disagreement between Husserl and his interpreters (in particular the existential dissidents) and finally with himself concerns the meaning of the reduction. For Merleau-Ponty what it means is primarily that to see the world one has to break one's familiarity with it and see it as paradoxical. But, he says, that rupture can teach us nothing but the unmotivated surging of the world, (PP viii, PP xiv) and he concludes that the greatest lesson of the reduction is that it teaches us the impossibility of a complete reduction. (Idem.) Far from being the program for a type of idealism, then, the reduction becomes for Merleau-Ponty a program for existentialism.[4] Fidelity to the reduction as Merleau-Ponty sees it is a means of steering clear of a sensualism which would change perception of the lived world into states of consciousness; and of idealism which changes it into the thought of or intellectual consciousness of the world. The world is not first of all what I think, but what I live. I communicate with it before any thought, and I cannot justify it or doubt it effectively.

Husserl had noticed, Merleau-Ponty says, that in the unreflected there are "Synthesen die vor aller Thesis liegen,"[5] which are the primordial beliefs (Urdoxa) eluding every argument that might be made against them, for they give us not a representation or a proposition about the world, but the world itself. The invitation to solipsism arises only after the natural attitude has been made into an explicit thesis. As a "synthesis prior to any thesis," it could be "refuted" only by death, by one's ceasing to be at the world.

Philosophy has on occasion tried to justify the world and my assent to it, to bridge a "gap" between representations and the "external" world. Merleau-Ponty believes that such an attempt presupposes that the pre-articulate natural attitude depends upon our explicit judgments, and that it turns things upside down. What compels us to assert that we are at the world by an act of the intellect? Would this not imply that explicit intentional acts are what uphold our conscious life?

Merleau-Ponty believes that it is Husserl's notion of fungierende Intentionalität which enables us to deal with the pre-articulate natural attitude, which is the ground of all the rest, and which we never abandon. This attitude is not that of the reflective self. Whose attitude is it then? It is that of my body, Merleau-Ponty answers.

A few examples may serve to further clarify this notion that we have been using right along. Merleau-Ponty observes that if a beam of light is thrown by an arc lamp on a disc,

one perceives what might be called a solid cone. But if a piece of white paper is inserted into the bottom portion of the "cone" the beam immediately takes on the characteristic of "lighting." The cone of light is now a stage for the paper, so to speak. "It is as if there were an incompatibility, vividly experienced, between the sight of the illuminated paper and that of a solid cone, and as if the significance of part of the spectacle induced a reassessment of the significance of the whole." (PP 380, PP 312) If a lamp which cannot be seen is moved around a statue at a constant distance we see the rotation of the light in the complex of changing shadows and colors which is all that is perceptible. It is true that we <u>can</u> infer that there is a light, but a "logic of lighting" is already there for perception before we <u>can</u> think about it. The organization of the field of presence is accomplished by an intentionality prior to thought. "Our perception in its entirety is animated by a logic which assigns to each object its determinate features in virtue of those of the rest." (PP 361, PP 313) The interpretation of numerous examples of this kind, in which the moments of the field of presence affect each other by a "wordless logic," make it possible for Merleau-Ponty to reject all traditional formulations which rely on the distinction between the sensible and the intellectual for their epistemology. He believes that the "sensible" must be reconstrued in terms of this pre-predicative logic of perception.

Not only is the corps propre's perceiving radically intentional in this sense, but at every moment it exerts itself to constitute a consistent and stable world and manages within limits to harmonize that moment with every other moment even at the price of "striking out" what is irrelevant to that moment of perception, as is shown in the general phenomena of color, weight and sound constancy. (Idem.)[6]

On the other hand, even my best efforts to attend to a particular segment of experience always finds it on a ground, which taken in complete generality is the world, and every present experience always arose out of the past and anticipates a future. This makes experience forcibly other i.e., not mine in the sense of being merely a mode of my pre-articulate consciousness. Other possibilities are always lurking in the temporal background (past and future) and in the general background which is the world.

In addition to the "opaqueness" of peripheral perception which is itself spread out on the even vaguer background of the world, there is a resistance (Merleau-Ponty speaks of "adversité") to the creative act by which there is a world for me. In this connection Merleau-Ponty refers to an experiment by Werner[7] in which it was found that if a subject tries to experience a determinate color, for example blue, while attempting to take the attitude which agrees with red, there results an interior struggle, a sort of spasm, which ceases as soon as the corporeal attitude which agrees with blue is adopted.

(PP 248, 214) "Thus, a sensibile which is going to be felt poses a kind of problem to my body. I have to find the attitude which is going to give it the means of determining itself, and of becoming blue, I have to find the answer to a question badly put." (Idem.) And yet I cannot do this without some solicitation; my attitude alone would never suffice to make me really see blue or really touch a hard surface. The sensibile returns to me what I have given it, but it is from the sensibile that I got it in the first place. So likewise in hearing, I deliver up a part of my body or perhaps my whole body to that manner of vibrating and filling space which is this particular sound. (Idem.)

The opaqueness of experience (the fact that it has an indefinite background both spatially and temporally), and its resistance (the fact that it cannot be just any experience for any corps propre at any time), and the fact that something must "solicit" an experience of a definite kind; all of this forces us pre-articulately to "assert" that the things are the way we experience them to be. This is a description of the natural attitude taken not as a set of propositions but as the anonymous activity of the corps propre. Perception is not my private spectacle because to be-at-the-world involves resistance and a temporal and spatial background which go out beyond any so called "momentary experience." Lived at by us, the thing is nevertheless "out there" because the human body is shot through by a movement towards the world. (PP 377, 327)

Even the pre-literate who sees his cousin, a blood relative, in the rabbit believes that it is his cousin. His claim is found to be "subjective" in the degree that it will not stand up under further scrutiny. For me the rabbit does not even begin to become my cousin because of the wake of my past. For the pre-literate it may never succumb to the counter weight of further perception because of the wake of his past. According to Merleau-Ponty no inquiry into what things really are can even in the remotest sense of the word be exhaustive, and we are "condemned to meaning" (PP xiv, PP xix) within a limited scope which is that of our personal existential possibilities. Artificial restrictions to the scope of experience can abet our naive convictions that we have found the truth about something, and a sophisticated scientific inquiry may find what is lawful or law-like about some of our experience for the present "cosmic epoch." [8]

For Merleau-Ponty the otherness of our perceptions is only dimly explained by a unique a priori space and time. The opacity and resistance of those perceptions is not explained at all. Critical philosophy may explain the objectivity of our knowing i.e., our science, but not the facticity (opaqueness and resistance) of our perceptions in spite of their being my creative act. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre makes it possible to speak of perception without appealing to an intellectual constituting consciousness and at the same time accounts for the facticity which characterizes our being-at-the-world.

Perception is for Merleau-Ponty the human constitution of a meaning with coherence and direction, a poesis replying to the solicitations of being according to the fond of this particular corps propre, following a style which has grown out of the original being-at-the-world achieved by our natural bodily endowment.

Perception of the Other

We have already alluded to Merleau-Ponty's contention that in perceiving the other's comportment I perceive his motor intentions which are the exercise of his corps propre. This is further illustrated as an important corollary to what we have just been discussing. It is essential that in perceiving, the background can become "figure," but this also means that in perceiving others I perceive their enjoyment in "figure" what is ground for me.

In this connection Merleau-Ponty recalls that in Ideen II Husserl discusses the relationship between the physical thing and "my" body. The regularities or correlations that could be set up between a locomotive's full boiler and my satiety would never make me believe or feel that the locomotive is part of my body. And yet my right hand can touch my left and feel it as a thing, which does not make the left hand any less part of my body. Now, it seems clear that my left hand (the "thing" of this experience) would become monstrous if I could not and in fact did not spontaneously reverse the order. My left hand felt would in effect cease to be

experienced as "my" hand could it not become a feeling hand. Such a hand would become an appendage of my corps propre if it could not become corps propre itself. In so far as the body is a living body that can be an object of that same living body it is both subject and object. The corps propre is a kind of consciousness which can perceive itself as an object.

Merleau-Ponty contends that the clear cut distinction between subject and object poles of experience is blurred in the experience of my-body-as-mine, touching my-body-as-object, and there is ample reason for believing that it is blurred in all lived experience. The perceived seems indeed to be the completion of my perception and hence it is articulate on my terms. But since it is articulate, this is so on its terms. It prescribes the law to me, and I prescribe the law to it. Furthermore, the present perceived thing which halts my glance promises an indefinite series of experiences and ordinarily fulfills that promise, otherwise I would subsequently recognize it as illusion. But what ties together the stages of exploration is clearly not an explicit intentional act, it is not the activity of a subject in full possession of itself and of transparently constituted objects. It is rather the pre-predicative constituting carried out by the corps propre.

It is not a thematic consciousness which is stimulated in my left hand when it is touched by my right, or in the right

when it is touching the left. Nor is it my thematic consciousness which is stimulated by the hand or glance of the other. Just as my two hands co-exist or are compresent because they are one single body's hands, so the other person appears through an extension of that compresence.[9] "He and I are like organs of one intercorporeality."[10] I do not, then, in perception constitute the other person's mind or infer it. My unthematized perception of the other has nothing to do with minds or bodies, for he is given to me as animate flesh, as corps propre. Of course, I can constitute behind a mannequin a presence-to-self like my own awareness, and in that case there would be introjection. But the act of seeing that the other sees is not a set of propositions however much the act of thinking that he thinks may be.[11]

The problem of intersubjectivity is not, then, how I can familiarize myself with your self-consciousness, unless it is presupposed that subjectivity is indistinguishable from the cogito. But the corps propre and its comportment is given to me in an "intentional arc" whereby there is the presence of a man's action to my incarnate being, of flesh to flesh and not of mind to mind. Merleau-Ponty maintains, then, that the riddle of empathy lies in its "aesthesiological phase" and that it is solved there because it is perception. "If the other is to exist for me, he must do so to begin with in an order beneath the order of thought."[12] And just as perceiving makes a latent but imperious claim to reach being, without pretending

to a monopoly on it in any form; perceiving the other is to encounter him in a manner that does not entail the death struggle of consciousness.[13]

An Epistemology of Aesthesis

In most of his writings Merleau-Ponty seems not only willing to accept but anxious to stress his adherence to what an Aristotelian would call a modified Idealism (perhaps more appropriately an Aestheticism).

The question as to whether perception is a disclosure of being is rarely even broached, and often seems to be rejected outright. And yet there are expressions which might be taken as implying a realism (such as Aristotle's). There are some highly metaphorical ones as when he says that "brute being flays our glance with its edges."[14] But there are many others that are more explicit. We have already mentioned his contention that being was an occasion for experience, and that it could be said to act on the corps propre by offering it a meaning. Then too when he is discussing what "solicits" our constitution of the world he makes statements which seem indistinguishable from a fairly straightforward realism. At one point, where he is holding forth on the inconceivability of a subject without a world, and observes that the absence of a visual world for the blind, or of an auditory world for the deaf does not rupture their communication with the world, he adds, that ". . . there is always something confronting him, some being to decipher, an omnitudo realitatis." (PP 379, PP 328)

Yet in general it is quite clear that for Merleau-Ponty, perception is the logicizing of being which is only then the world. Being may be "behind" the world, but the world is what one is involved in directly as well as what spreads out indefinitely beyond that momentary involvement both spatially and temporally. However, we do not find Merleau-Ponty giving a positive account of how being "solicits" my experience of the world. For the confirmed Aristotelian it is difficult to imagine how being could solicit our experience or offer the corps propre a meaning unless it were already structured. For Merleau-Ponty it is impossible to imagine what structure being could have independently of being perceived. For him our perceiving and knowing are limited by the fact that it is this corps propre which perceives and knows, and the meanings we possess are not so much "given" as "taken up," reprise interiormente par nous.

Yet, when he illustrates our communion with the world he draws an analogy to the Sacrament, which according to Catholic tradition not only symbolizes in sensible species the operation of grace, but is also the real presence of God. The sensibile, he says, not only signifies the thing motorally and vitally, but it is the thing present, and just as Communion requires inward preparation, so the fragments of the world are seized and acted upon only if the corps propre is ready for them. (PP 246, PP 212) "If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence (a certain 'substantiality'), if

they have the power to cast a spell and what has just now been called a sacramental value, this is not because the sensing subject posits them as objects, but because he enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds in them his momentary law." (PP 247, PP 214)

It is significant that Merleau-Ponty does not press the analogy. Communion produces its "effect" according to Catholic tradition ex opere operato, and the only thing that the subject brings to the encounter is a capacity for grace, his inward preparation.

Finally, Merleau-Ponty's references to Berkeley are all in approbation of the principle that esse est percipi. But for Merleau-Ponty it is the corps propre which perceives and for whom things are. Since his theory of knowledge fits no strict traditional categories, it would perhaps be most appropriate to call it an existential theory of human experience (Greek aesthesis).

Footnotes to chapter five

1. The phrase "nascent perception" was used to contrast it with the perceived object. In this chapter we shall speak rather of pre-predicative perception, to contrast it with thematic or explicit knowledge.

2. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes, p. 206, Signs, p. 163.

3. Pre-articulate, is used interchangeably with pre-thematic and pre-objective by Merleau-Ponty. The terms refer to the lived world prior to thematization.

4. "Heidegger's in-der-Welt-Sein," he says "appears only against the background of the phenomenological reduction." (PP lx, xiv)

5. Husserl, E., Ideen II p. 22, quoted in Signes, p. 206, Signs, p. 163)

6. Clinical phenomena and psychological experiments often serve as ad hoc epoché for Merleau-Ponty. They suspend the normal everyday insertion into the world and enable him to glimpse what the body must be accomplishing.

7. Werner (no initial), Untersuchung über Empfindung und Empfinden, I, p. 158 (PP 248, PP 236)

8. The expression is Whitehead's, but the same notion is expressed by Merleau-Ponty in SC. p. 147, SB. 138.

9. Cf. Husserl, E., Ideen II, p. 166. Quoted by Merleau-Ponty, Signes p. 213 Signs p. 168.

10. Idem.

11. It seems that Merleau-Ponty expresses this contradictorily; ". . . quand je dis: je vois qu'il voit, il n'y a plus la, comme dans: je pense qu'il pense, emboitement de deux propositions l'une dans l'autre." (Italics mine) However, in context his meaning is clear. (Signes p. 214, Signs 169)

12. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes 215, Signs, 170.

13. Cf. Idem. No doubt an allusion to Hegel's Master-Slave relationship.

14. Op. cit. 199, op. cit., 158.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CORPS PROPRE AS SPEECH

Avant Propos

We may sum up Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre regarding speech by saying that words themselves are their own meaning. Just as my gestures are meaning giving acts so are my words, and there is no need to posit behind either gesture or word a meaning which they convey. Both an empiricist and intellectualist analysis of language, he contends, end by, in effect, denying that words themselves mean, and by showing how words mean both analyses are surpassed (surmonte). (PP 207, 177)

It will be helpful to begin by indicating Merleau-Ponty's dept to Husserl for the key notions of his doctrine of the word. Merleau-Ponty observes that Husserl gradually moved the problem of language into a central position for phenomonology.[1] In the fourth of the Logical Investigations, Husserl still conceived actual languages as special cases of a possible language to which consciousness holds the key. This possible language must be thought of as in some sense containing the meanings expressed by the various languages. Since speaking is carried on in the various actual languages, speech must be an accompaniment to meaning, a means of communication. Meaning is on this view somehow other than the words. But in later writings, language appears as an original way of intending certain objects, as thought's body.[2]

There is a passage in the Formale und Transzendentale Logik which Merleau-Ponty quotes in its entirety where Husserl says that meaning does not lie alongside or outside the words, but that in speaking I constantly fuse word and meaning. The relation of word to thought is comparable to that of body to consciousness. The thought is incarnate in the language, but there is a single reality, the living word.[3] Merleau-Ponty thus seconds Pos's claim that the phenomenology of language is not an eidetic of all possible languages, but a return to the speaking subject.[4]

Now the experiences one has when learning or doing mathematics may seem irrelevant to the discipline as such. The same has been said for language as it is often conceived by linguistics. Thus the distinction Saussure made between langue and parole (between the language system considered as an observable, and speech acts) has been exceedingly helpful to the linguist. But it has often been made to the detriment of the study of speech acts, and even to the slighting of questions of meaning. Efforts are now being made to remedy this situation by systematic studies in semasiology.[5] But what Merleau-Ponty has to say about speech acts has another scope. His analysis of the speech act reveals that there is a far reaching philosophical inadequacy in the distinction between thought or meaning, and word or sign vehicle respectively. It also shows how this distinction harbors a confusion which in effect denies meaning to the word.[6] It also

throws light on what it is that leads to the notion of that ultimate possible language Husserl was searching for in the Investigations. In addition, it shows that actual languages are the embodiment of a contingent logic[7] and it finds the notion of a non-incarnate logic to be an error. Finally it makes it clear why the problem of language and knowledge are inseparable.

The Psychology of Word and Meaning

We said above that the empiricist and intellectualist analysis of language end up in effect denying that words mean. To illustrate this Merleau-Ponty reviews two opposing interpretations of language disorders. The one following an empiricist tradition understands the possession of language as the actual existence of verbal images or brain traces left in us by words spoken or heard. On these views the word is elicited by "states of mind" or stimuli according to the laws of association or neurological mechanics respectively. The word itself has no meaning but is set alongside the psychic or physiological phenomena.

Since there are language deficiencies which affect speech but not writing and vice versa, certain authors[8] considered it necessary to revise these conceptions. They had recourse to a "symbolic function" or "categorial ability" to explain elective linguistic disturbances. Merleau-Ponty believes that the authors he mentions here, and particularly Grünbaum,[9] were in effect moving toward an existential interpretation of

aphasia, an interpretation which would treat "concrete language" and "categorial or symbolic language" as two manifestations of a fundamental activity whereby man projects himself towards a world. He cites Grunbaum who says of apraxic patients (who know what they want to do, but cannot carry out their intention) ". . . that it is not the symbolic or meaning-giving function in general which has been affected in cases of this kind, but a far more basic function of a motor character, that is, the capacity for motor differentiation within the dynamic corporeal schema."[10]

There are cases of amnesia relating to the naming of colors in which the patient cannot name or isolate manually red ribbons from others. The patient has lost the general ability to "subsume colors under a category," and it is thought that the loss of speech is merely a part of that general disability. But a concrete description does not reveal that he cannot keep one classification or category in mind, that he goes from one to another; in reality he never adopts any. The disturbance touches "the way in which the visual field is put together from the point of view of colors."[11] Hence it is not only the thought or knowledge, but the very experience of colors which is in question. In Kantian terms, Merleau-Ponty suggests, we might say that the disturbance "affects not so much the understanding as the productive imagination." (224, 192)

In their studies of amnesic aphasia, Gelb and Goldstein

are led to conclude that "it cannot be the lack of the word taken in itself which makes categorial behavior difficult or impossible. Words must have lost something which normally belongs to them and which fits them for use in relation to categorial behavior."[12]

What have they lost, asks Merleau-Ponty? To say that they have lost the concept would not explain why these patients can repeat the names of the colors but are unable to sort them manually. There are other patients for whom words have lost their meaning and yet can still manage to isolate red ribbons from the rest. Faced with a red ribbon they cannot speak the name until they recall a strawberry, which permits them to speak the word red.[13] This indicates for Merleau-Ponty that there is indeed an inner content to language, but that it is not a thought or an idea for why should such a thought be related to ribbons only through strawberries? What then does language express, if it does not express thoughts?

Below the level of what is accurately called abstract ability, or knowledge, there seems to be a certain manner of relating oneself to the world which would inappropriately be called either a categorial ability or pure motricity. It is rather what we have already met with in previous chapters as a pre-predicative knowing. "What is expressed in language," Merleau-Ponty says, "is the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings." (PP 225, PP 193)

The "categorial act" is not an ultimate fact, it builds itself up into a certain attitude. It is on this attitude that language is based, but the actual "phonetic gesture" is a certain structural co-ordination of existence which is a significant core transcending the powers of the body taken as a physical process. "This act of transcendence is first found in the acquisition of a pattern of comportment, then in the mute communication of non-verbal gesture." (PP 226, PP 163) It is through this same fundamental capacity that the body opens itself to some new kind of comportment which is speech. This over all capacity can be affected either by lesion or trauma of existence which will modify the subject's normal being at the world, for it is the corps propre which is affected in either case.

The corps propre seems to be a system of indefinite powers which can break up, decenter and reorganize under a fresh law unknown to the subject which reveals itself only in the complete articulation. The knitting of the eye-brows, for instance, which enable one to see sharply can also express discontent. Likewise the air passing out of the lungs through the phonetic apparatus used as a direction of one's existence is already a word, though it will not communicate unless it takes place within an organized system of word-gestures which a whole group is capable of using.

If this analysis is basically correct then it can be said that speech is neither an operation of intelligence nor

a motor phenomenon devoid of intentionality. "It is wholly motility and wholly intelligence." (226, PP 194) Yet since it is true that linguistic deficiencies sometimes affect what might be called the material instrument of verbal expression, sometimes the existential attitude on the basis of which we succeed in saying a word and sometimes the structure of the whole experience, we are led to conclude that speech rests upon a stratification of powers that can be relatively isolated. "But at the same time it is impossible to find anywhere a linguistic disturbance which is 'purely motor' and which does not to some extent impinge upon the significance of language." (PP 227, PP 195)

The neat categories of empiricism and intellectualism resume the Cartesian tradition which is accustomed to two senses and only two for the word "exist," either "one exists as a thing or else one exists as a consciousness. But the experience of our own bodies . . . reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing." (PP 231, PP 198) Experience and motricity do not seem "causally" related but are both drawn into and mutually involved in a unique drama. But it is in speech that the surplus of our existence over physical reality is most manifest.

La Parole Parlée and La Parole Parlante

On the basis of his analysis Merleau-Ponty suggests a restatement of Saussure's distinction between langue and parole, between "means of expression" and "speech acts."

A distinction might be made between the word in the speaking (parole parlante) and the spoken word (parole parlée). (PP 229, PP 197) The former would be the one in which a human existence polarizes itself in a certain sens[1] which cannot be defined in terms of an object. These acts build a linguistic world and in a sense fall back into physical reality when they are "on the air" or are crystallized in a mark on a piece of paper. In another sense the paroles parlees represent an "acquired fortune," which the speaker can use if he has learned them, and if he has not learned them may yet discover them.

The philosophical significance of this acquired fund of language, whether we take it as a personal or cultural acquisition, is that one can lose sight of the fact that it is a contingent fact. What justifies this view, the one that we ordinarily take toward language, is that it can not only settle into a sediment for use in human relationships, but it also includes the notion of truth as the presumptive limit of its scope. We do not paint about painting, or write music about music, or gesture about gesture, but we do speak about speech; and the philosopher can dream of achieving a discourse which will supercede all others, which would be the truth. A privilege is accorded to reason and rightly so, but to understand it clearly, Merleau-Ponty believes that "we must begin by putting thought back among the phenomena of expression." (221, PP 190)

It seems clear that the meaning of music is identified with the notes, and the notes played are not the signs of the meaning of the sonata, for the music is there only through the notes. If we attend to the emotive meaning of language it also seems clear that the meaning is indistinguishable from the "tone of voice." It seems natural to say that the irony was conveyed by the expression, but one is not so likely to say that the idea of irony is anything more than what is contained in the actual expression of it. Similarly what the non-verbal gesture conveys does not easily invite the assertion that it means anything else but what it "says." It is in fact quite difficult to re-express just what the gesture does mean without repeating it. In fact we would have recourse to words.

But the case of language as we ordinarily think of it readily allows us to say that what we expressed by <u>such and such</u>, was <u>so and so</u>. We can speak about speech in the sense that what we have said can be said another way for both assertions have basically the "same meaning." If we want to know what <u>that</u> meaning is, we must rephrase both assertions. But the new assertion is another assertion, and to give <u>its</u> meaning we can only reassert it or express it by another set of words. Merleau-Ponty contends that there is no reason to grant that the meaning is distinguishable from the words. Language rests on itself. We expressed our meaning perhaps with less precision or elegance in the first instance. The

word is a gesture, and it contains its meaning in the same way as the gesture contains its meaning. (PP 214, PP 183)

Yet it is impossible to draw up an inventory of that power possessed by an existent who transends what may be called an anatomical apparatus, who can create meanings and convey them. Speech is merely one particular case of that power, and by it man superimposes on the "given" world the world of the word, the world according to man.

Just as I do not have to take stock of external space (much less Euclidean "external" space) and my own body with respect to it in order to move, so I do not take stock of the meaning and my phonemic apparatus with respect to a system of tokens in order to speak. I find a word as I find my leg to place it before the other when walking, and just as I do not think about the way I must flex my leg to move, so the orator does not think before he speaks, nor while he speaks, rather his speech is his thought.

Philosophy of Word and Meaning

If the word means there must be no difference between the words and what is ordinarily called thinking.[16] That is why one feels ignorant of his thoughts until he formulates them, and it is also why the thought requires the word. (PP 212, PP 182) When one has the feeling that he has to "think" to "find the words" to express his thought, he is in the process of recentering and reorganizing at the pre-articulate level what will emerge as a living word sequence.

We often feel that we must name a thing in order to know what it is, and conversely we often feel that we know what it is when we do name it. If the meaning of objects or properties does not so much follow recognition as complete it, this feeling would be clarified. Also why did pre-literates equate the name with the thing? We cannot believe that they could not tell the difference between an act of phonation and a dog. So too, what lies behind verbal magic? New light is thrown upon all these questions when we realize that speech is not a vehicle of thought, but its realization in the corps propre.

Merleau-Ponty's differences from the empiricist and intellectualist with regard to language may be brought out also by comparing his views with less radically empiricist and intellectualist analyses of language than those considered above in the "psychology of word and meaning."

In their book, The Meaning of Meaning, C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards state unequivocally that talk of words outside the symbol-reference-referent triangle is a confusion.[17] Meaning is a function of symbol-reference-referent. But it may be that they subscribe to another sort of confusion, for they assert that "It may be unnecessary to insist that there is no direct connection between say 'dog' the word, and certain objects in our streets."[18] (Italics mine) And they continue, ". . . we shall find, however that the kind of simplification typified by this once universal theory of

direct meaning relations between words and things is the source of almost all the difficulties which thought encounters [on these matters].[19] (Italics theirs.)

To say that such a theory was universal is a rather surprising historical inaccuracy,[20] to say that it is a source of difficulty is perhaps undeniable. The question is whether words always imply things corresponding to them. For Ogden and Richards there is meaning when the "base of the meaning triangle is filled in" i.e., when the word in fact refers to a "real object." The object is defined for them as that which is scientifically verifiable. Other uses of words are at best emotive.

But the fact of the matter is that the "base of the triangle" is normally filled in, not by the thing, but by the intentional object, otherwise the word collapses into a mere physical or physiological process, flatus vocis the Scholastics used to say. The referent is not merely an object of science, but any intentional object whatsoever. If this were not so there would be no referent for "askew," for "wangle," for "science," error would have no meaning, and it would be inconceivable how it could mislead us if it did not.

Pre-literates do not seem to make a distinction between word and object. But even a very sophisticated, literate person does not ordinarily make a distinction between a person's name and the person named. It is a veritable tour de force to distinguish one's own name from oneself when another

uses it. It is in discussions about signs and symbols that word and meaning are distinguished. In fact the distinctions are made to the point that frequently their fusion in use becomes difficult to imagine.

Aristotle also makes the distinction between symbols, reference and referent when he says that "spoken words are the signs of mental experiences."[21] He is quite specific about the matter. Sound, he says, is a movement of air. Significant sound (phonē semantikē) is sound with meaning which is the vox significativa of the Medievals. In addition Aristotle distinguishes dialectos (speech) from significant sounds. Animals are capable of the latter, but only man of the former.[22] With this Merleau-Ponty would fully agree. But Aristotle also says that "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience," and he assigns this as the reason why all men have not the same speech sounds, though the mental experiences are the same for all.[23] This seems to imply that the body's movements express something other than themselves i.e., the meaning.

On Merleau-Ponty's view, words do not stand for mental experiences, rather they are a modulation of the motor intentionality of the corps propre. The words are themselves, if we may use Aristotle's term for "mental affections" (enuloi logoi)[24] enmattered intentions. The notion of symbol both in Aristotle and in Ogden and Richards seems to rely on one thing's (the word's)[25] standing for another (the referent)

and the reference of one to the other. Thus "square" can stand for , more significantly "square" can stand for , or , or . For none of these authors is the reference out there on the piece of paper, and it is at least clear that a word("square" in this case) stands for a referent only through human reality.

The statement that a word or symbol or sign stands for something can easily hide an equivocation. A symbol is simply a token, a thing, unless it is actually used to refer to what it represents.[26] But does this use of language mean that a person relates "square" to ? Or does it not rather mean that square is to me? Square is because attending to either I am at the world in a very similar manner, and not because I have related them or even used "square" to mean . Speech first comes to life in a motor intention which is the word that means. There is a paradox about the parole parlante, for it cannot be itself unless it is not itself, i.e., by speaking, the whole verbal being of the corps propre is to be of . . . whatever.

The triadic relation of a self who uses a word to refer to a thing is then artificial, however useful the distinction may be. Its artificiality appears in that the word becomes a physiological movement of the phonemic apparatus, the act of referring a disembodied act, and the thing something to which the physiological movement is linked.

For Merleau-Ponty the word is indistinguishable realiter

from the corps propre modulation that is phonetic gesture, and it may very well mean not the standard sense but a wholly idiosyncratic sense, deriving from a personal history. Moreover the very same overt verbal gestures that one hears from different individuals may be very different intentions, for the resources of intentionality are individual. What one hears as the same utterance may in point of fact be a different utterance to each.

The normal use of words is the corps propre in action;[27] and their having a meaning is like my having fears or desires. Just as my fear is me fearing something, so my speaking is me meaning something. It is the corps propre which says something, not the mind through the body.

Communication

The communication of the utterance is also given greater clarity by this analysis. If I say that the words I hear reveal what was the private experience of the other, then to hear is to interpret a sound. It would then seem that there must be a system within the other which encodes the meaning into a physical vehicle, and in me a system which decodes that physical vehicle into a meaning. If I say that the words I hear are a perception of the motor intentions of the other, then to hear is to perceive the other's motor intentions, which is in fact a description of my actual experience in a special terminology.

Moreover what I grasp in another's expression are utterances

not words which have to be "brought together." The notion that I understand another's expression word by word (or morpheme by morpheme given meaning) is akin to the notion that I see the tree by synthesizing its individual parts. When someone says something that has never been said before how is it that I understand something new? It might be replied that it is because I know the individual words. But what has to be explained is how I understood something new. There was no novelty in the words, only in the significant sequence, and that is what I perceive, a temporal Gestalt and not some sort of positive entities (morphemes) or even words for that matter but the new utterance.

Because gestures (including utterances) are embodied intentions, I do not have to interpret private intentions. Of course I may be deceived or make an error in perceiving any particular verbal gestures. A successful deception is carried out when the corps propre of the deceiver so effectively executes the comportment of deceit that it is effectively taken up not as a deception but as straightforward earnest comportment. The reason why he can deceive me is that his actions are intentional and I perceive them. If I myself am circumspect I may not rely on my perception but on discursive reasoning and explicit judgments. This would be the proper sense of interpreting another's comportment.

A difficulty arises. If the corps propre is embodied intentionality and it is for that reason that I do not have

to "get into" the other to understand him,then how do I understand a book, which is clearly not a corps propre or comportment? what corresponds to the corps propre in my perception or understanding of a cultural object? Merleau-Ponty does not bring this question up in exactly this form, but what he says in "Eye and Mind"[28] is in effect an attempt to answer it.

Merleau-Ponty points out that there seems to be no problem about specifying where the walls of Lascaux are (we could give their approximate distances with respect to say the tour eiffel), but the animals that are painted on those walls are not "there" in the same sense (unless we take them as tokens). It would be more accurate perhaps to say that my "gaze wanders in" such artifacts than that it establishes their locale or material structure. "It is more accurate to say that I see according to it [the artifact] or with it, than that I see it."[29] When I look at a painting as when I perceive any cultural object (hear a tape-recording, read a book) I commune with what was once an operant intention. Just as all the tools I use skillfully blend with the intentions of the corps propre, so the materials affected by the tools of the artist take on a structure dictated by operant and thematic intentions. If it is a great work I may grasp more than was deliberately put into it, for the artist himself was not self-consciously aware of his operant intentions.

Moreover, even in the perception of comportment I do not

perceive the other's motor intentions as he experiences them. The perception of another's experience is not what is involved in saying that one must empathize, that one must "live" the other's intentions, in order to grasp them. The case of language perception is merely one of the many forms of Einfuhlung.[30] To understand a language (written or spoken) it is necessary for me to enter into a style of existence, to assume it for myself and the understanding is most complete when I can myself speak it the same way. (PP 92 PP 83) The closest we can get to reading the same meaning is to grasp what were the operant and thematic intentions of the author with a high degree of convergence or agreement. To do this systematically would require a theory for the interpreation of meaning which is hermeneutics.

A Difficulty

Even if we understand Merleau-Ponty's identification of speech with thought as signifying that language is thought, and not that they are terms of equal extension (there is "wordless thought"), he must still answer the difficulty suggested by that observation by Aristotle to which we referred earlier. It is counterintuitive to deny outright Aristotle's assertion that all men have the same experiences though they have different languages. If thought and language are identical in use as Merleau-Ponty says they are, why are languages not as similar as men's experiences? "Su sevdigim kiz" and "this is the girl I love," are very dissimilar in vocabu-

lary and syntax. A literal translation of the Turkish expression into English would be something like "This pertaining to love my girl," and the "my" is connected with "pertaining to love" not to "girl." Yet when I use "su sevdigim kiz," I do not feel hardly any, if any, difference from when I use "this is the girl I love." The polyglot is usually perplexed when he is asked what language he thinks in. He himself does not know.

One might easily answer that it is the tokens which are different, while the meanings are the same. Merleau-Ponty cannot grant that distinction in the parole parlante as we have seen. Putting the problem into slightly different terms, how can Merleau-Ponty account for the apparent "naturalness" or uniformity of what Aristotle called mental experiences, and the seeming "conventionality" of different languages that "express" them?

We may answer for Merleau-Ponty by saying that de jure the corps propre may use any modulation to express its existence. In principle any movement could mean anything, but when it is used it actually means something in particular. There is nothing "natural" about any movement whereby existence expresses itself, de jure.

De facto, however, there seem to be numerous limitations to the "conventionality" of expression. Some of these are no doubt that:

(a) For most practical purposes of communication the

utterance tends to be embodied in the phonemic apparatus, and not in other parts of the body such as the toes . (b) The segmentations of the field of perception at certain levels of perception at least, tend to be similar, as is shown by comportment. The Gestalt that is formed of

. . . .

is more "natural" as groups of two-pica-spaced-dots than as groups of six-pica-spaced-dots with a single dot on each end. Only defective men will not be able to segment, and eventually express in some way or another what I will have to call "the rabbit in the forest." Thus languages will tend to have an extremely high number of equivalent words (parole parlee) and their uses will be similar (parole parlante).

(c) A neo-logism or a uniquely novel sequence is born only within a more or less well established system of utterance. The system however is first of all and finally not that of a possible language in general, nor of a particular "language," but of the individual corps propre with its capacity for intersubjectivity. (d) Probably of less importance, but relevant nevertheless, is that there is probably something natural i.e., non-arbitrary, about designating night by "night" if we use "light" for light. At least there would be something prima facie perverse about using "schtrupontikalifatas" for "on" in English. Whorf has in fact given a formula for all the possible monosyllabic words that are possible in English.[31]

An Inconsistency

It is clear in a number of instances that Merleau-Ponty's distinction between parole parlée and parole parlante is the one we have expressed with "token" and "speech" respectively. For example he says "We have already distinguished the empirical word, the word as a phenomenon of sound. . . which can occur without thought. . . and the authentic word by which an idea begins to exist." (PP 448, PP 390) Elsewhere, however, he distinguishes the "authentic word which formulates for the first time" from "secondary expression which makes up the ordinary run of empirical language," and he adds that only the first is identical with thought. (PP 207, PP 178) In these passages Merleau-Ponty seems to equate the "empirical language" sometimes with tokens and sometimes with language as a system. Furthermore, he identifies "authentic speech" sometimes with what we have called a novel sequence or a neo-logism, though at other times he equates it with parole parlante which is simply the speech act.

Consistent with his own view it would seem to be more appropriate to distinguish at least the following kinds of parole parlante, i.e., speech acts: a) Instances in which the speech acts duplicate something previously said; b) Instances in which they are a use of the available lexicon and syntax (in some sense of available-either from memory, dictionaries, grammars, etc.) in reputable standing, in order to express something that has never been said in exactly the same way

e.g., the present sentence; c) Instances in which they involve the use of new terms and/or syntax which are not available except from the general resources of the corps propre. As Merleau-Ponty himself says, ". . . every gesture must have been new once, and we must recognize this open and indefinite power of signifying." (PP 207, PP 178) The historical and personal development of language works as an open system; though not independent of cultural conditions, yet not wholly dependent on them.

Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the utterance has clearly separated the question of meaning from that of truth or certitude--the question of rationality. That does not mean, however, that they are not unrelated. There are certain utterances available to a mature and learned adult which may be taken up and seem to enjoy a permanent validity. These have been called "truths." Our discussion requires that we bring out at least briefly the consequences for rationality and truth that seem to be entailed by Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre regarding speech.

Footnotes to chapter six

1. ". . . wir uns bewusst sind, dass eine radicale Aufklarung der Seinsart der 'idealen Sinngebilde' heir (in the problems of language) ihren tiefesten Problem-grund haben muss" Husserl, E., Die Frage nach der Ursprung der Geometrie als international-historisches Problem. This article appeared in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, (Jan. 1939). Quoted by Merleau-Ponty, Signes 106, Signs, 85.

2. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes 106, Signs 85.

3. "Diese aber (sc. die Meinung) liegt nicht ausserlich neben der Worten; sondern redend vollziehen wir fortlaufend ein inneres, sich mit den Worten verschmelzendes, sie gleichsam beseelendes Meinen. Der Erfolg dieser Beseelung ist, dass die Worte und die ganzen Reden in sich eine Meinung gleichsam verleiblichen und verleiblicht in sich als Sinn tragen." p. 20. Quoted by Merleau Ponty op. cit., idem.

4. Pos, J., "Phenomenologie et Linguistic," in Revue International de Philosophie. (1939), quoted by Merleau-Ponty Signes 107, Signs 86.

5. Cf. Stern, Gustaf., Meaning and the Change of Meaning, p. 2 sqq.

6. It is crucial to an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's position to realize that he does not advocate complete abandonment of the distinctions between meaning and sign vehicle, or word and thought. They may have vital roles in various discourse. His point is that they are philosophically misleading.

7. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes 110, Signs 88.

8. He mentions H. Head, Van Woerkom, Grünbaum, and K. Goldstein. (PP 222, PP 190)

9. Grünbaum, A.A., "Aphasie et motorik," Zeitschrift f.d. ges. Neurologie und Psychiatrie, (1930) pp. 397-398.

10. Idem., quoted by Merleau-Ponty (PP 166, PP 142).

11. Gelb and Goldstein, Über Farbennamenamnesie (1925) p. 162 quoted by Merleau-Ponty PP 224, PP 191.

12. Idem p. 158 (PP 225, PP 192).

13. Gelb and Goldstein, op. cit., p. 177.

14. In the French, the word "sens" is placed in quotes, implying apparently that he means both "direction" and "meaning."

15. The word considered as a thing.

16. Of course there is "wordless thinking." Consider pondering a move in chess or recalling an accident in imagination. For Merleau-Ponty these are more akin to perception. When he says "what is ordinarily called thinking," he is apparently referring to discursive thought. The supposed silence of soliloquy is teeming with words.

17. Ogden, C. K., Richards, I. A., The Meaning of Meaning, p. 10-11.

18. Op. cit. p. 12.

19. Idem.

20. Cf. Aristotle, De Interpretatione, 1 (16 a 6), and Hist. An. IV ch. 9 (535 a 26)

21. Aristotle, De Interpretatione, 1, (16 a 3).

22. Cf. Aristotle, Historia Animalium, IV ch. 9 (535 a 26). Also Larkin, Miriam Therese, C.S.J., A Study of Language in the Philosophy of Aristotle. Doctoral Dissertation, Notre Dame University, June 1965.

23. Aristotle, De Interpretatione, 1, (16 a 6).

24. Grote, Aristotle, Vol. 1, p. 167.

25. One may substitute symbol, sign, sign vehicle, or token in this paragraph and the net result is the same.

26. Smoke heralds fire only for someone.

27. Even the so called mention of a word as opposed to its use, such as "breakfast," is in the context of a sentence the use of the word i.e., to designate a noun or something said in English.

28. Merleau-Ponty, M., "Eye and Mind" The Primacy of Perception and other Essays, p. 159. Cf. also Signes p. 49 Signs, p. 39.

29. Merleau-Ponty, M., "Eye and Mind," p. 164.

30. It was Dilthey who probably first gave this term approximately the meaning that it has here.

31. Whorf, op. cit., p. 258.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PAROLE PARLANTE AND "CONTINGENT TRUTH"

In this chapter we can do no more than evoke in broad outlines some of the consequences for rationality that seem to follow from Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of the corps propre regarding the utterance. We will limit ourselves specifically to these major points: (a) How Merleau-Ponty, who has identified the parole parlante (which is a contingent fact) with thought, can account for the apparent permanent value of some utterances, in particular for essential definitions or "truths;" (b) How the replacement of eternal truths with contingent truths does not involve a vulgar relativism.

First, it should be pointed out that Merleau-Ponty believes that his analysis of perception and the utterance escapes the dilemma of adhering either to idealism or realism. The problem of truth in the sense of the conformity of intellect and thing en soi cannot arise in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. In the classical sense to possess truth was not merely to possess knowledge of the thing, to apprehend the essence, but to affirm or deny that the apprehended essence conforms to the thing. To state a truth was to make a judgment, to affirm or deny the essence of the thing.[1]

But the experience of the corps propre, whether pre-predicative or thematic, cannot "conform" to the thing en soi because for Merleau-Ponty the thing en soi is a limiting notion of all the meanings or intentions considered as a

presumed totality. For Merleau-Ponty the intentional objects of the corps propre are the things themselves. We have tried to show how this is not a contradiction, nor does it involve subjectivism, for our perceptions and utterances are of the world, hence our definitions can also be of the world. What the corps propre does in defining an essence is to aim at a more adequate knowing than that of perception or common discourse and the experience of truth is the experience of a meaning and direction that the polarizations of intentions take, possessing consistency and reliability.

This would be a form of solipsism if subjectivity were experience of its constituted act, i.e., if being-at-the-world were being-at-my-private-world tout court. But one's experience is not the world, it is of the world. The world is not one's experience but that which one existentially intends, and within the horizon of that experience is the horizon of what others intend, so that the world is the same not merely specifically but numerically for us all. The oneness of the world is not founded on the unity of thematic subjectivity, but on that of one's pre-predicative being-at-the-world. (PP 464, PP 405) Only if consciousness were pure subjectivity (in something like Descartes' sense) would the hopeless estrangement from others and the world that is expressed by the notion of a plurality of worlds be definitive.

Crucial for Merleau-Ponty's notion of truth is that one perceives not only a world of objects, but also the other.

The corps propre experiences itself as constituted by the other at the very moment it is functioning as constituting. "It happens that my gaze stumbles against other instances of seeing [those of other corps propres] and is thwarted by them. I am invested by them just when I thought I was investing them, and I see a figure sketched out in space that arouses. . . the possibilities of my own body as if it were a matter of my own gestures or comportment. Everything happens as if the functions of intentionality and the intentional object were paradoxically interchanged."[2] The hearing of speech is an outstanding instance of this perception which reverses my ordinary relationships to objects and gives certain Gestalten the value of subjects.

Some utterances can pretend to an eternal validity though they are in fact present moments of expressed intentionality because those expressions are basic enough to remain relevant for further experience and expression, mine and those of others. It could be said then that ideal existence, the world of ideas is in documents in so far as these documents bring together all knowers thereby establishing a logos of the cultural world.[3]

Since our erratic thoughts and the events of our life and those of history itself, seem to take on a common meaning and direction and since this meaning and direction can be grasped and expressed in an utterance to which our fellows can agree, our ideas can be true. Thus the definition or "idea" seems

to go beyond or to surpass its actual temporal use. In the definition one attempts to say the thing en soi and may believe that he has caught up the entire network of relationships (noeud des relations) that are that thing en soi, or at least a point of intersection where all possible points of view assemble.[4] The definition is an "attempt to crystallize figures in a gesture so free of the point of view that solicited it and of the corps propre which incarnated it, that it can both express the situation in its generality (in other words make present only that portion which seems valid for all people and all times) and be taken up by anybody in any situation from any point of view." (PP 449, PP 392) The presumption that in the definition I have expressed all the intentions that have gone into making it up and can go into making it up; and that inversly all the intentions can be drawn out of it by analysis, becomes the conviction that I have grasped the essence. This presumed acquisition of an absolute truth about any figure is abetted by the marvelous efficacy of some words to be taken up again and again through history. What is unique about the permanently utilizable word is that it seems to overcome time and even pretends to an eternity.

But, Merleau-Ponty asks, what is that eternity? Is it a sum total of all "presents," past ones and future ones; some sort of objective and continuous time stuff from which each present takes a morsel, like a segment of an infinite line?

"The recourse to eternity," Merleau-Ponty believes, "is rendered necessary only by an objective conception of time." (PP 429, PP 374) What is in fact unique about my certitude about anything whatever is that it seems to overcome all doubt for all time. But on this score any statement of fact, like "napoleon is dead," is as true as a theorem. There would be no truth, the necessities for example that characterize the relationships of a triangle, if the individual person did not overcome the dispersion of time, did not in some sense overcome the simple act of being discursively at the triangle. What is important, according to Merleau-Ponty is to understand such acts. (PP 441, 385) First of all the construction of a triangle refers to the configuration-triangle, a Gestalt, to relations which may be expressed in the words "above," "prolong," etc. If these words have a meaning, it is because I operate on a perceptible or imaginary triangle which is oriented with respect to a high, a low, a right and a left. The construction of the geometrical triangle draws out the limiting possibilities of the configuration-triangle. The geometrical triangle does not have any real properties, but is the formula of an attitude, a certain modality of my being-at-the-world. What one calls the essence of the triangle is that presumption of an achieved synthesis by which a mathematician has defined it.

The corps propre, in so far as it is inseparable from a point of view on the world, is the condition for the possibil-

ity not only of the geometrical synthesis but of all accomplishments which constitute the cultural world. (PP 445, PP 388) Definitions are one of these accomplishments and so is music. The Prince by Machiavelli or the Ninth Symphony by Beethoven are as eternal as the triangle. If all copies of these works were destroyed or lost there would be no The Prince or Ninth Symphony except in the memories of men, but the same would be the case for the triangle if all works on geometry were destroyed or lost. (PP 447, PP 390)

If an utterance could be the expression of a pure essence by a pure constituting consciousness it would be wholly clear to the person who speaks. But the utterances of the corps propre are like music or gestures in that they cannot be analyzed to find out what they ultimately and finally really mean. We can never resolve the fundamental obscurity of the expressed. We say that someone has died, but we do not know what it is to die. And yet we know what we said. "Language transcends us and yet we speak." (PP 453, PP 395) This forced Pascal to conclude that there is a transcendent thought which words spell out.

In contrast to this, Merleau-Ponty, develops the notion of a genesis of meaning in the human body, a contingent truth arising ontogenetically from the ground of our original and irrefutable involvement in the world. To be at the world is already to know something, to have some truth, and one's reason and definitions always involve some presupposition,

they always involve something not fully explicit. As Husserl says, they rest on a sedimented history,[5] and this sedimented history is where one will find not only the genealogy of his thought, but its sens (both direction and meaning). (PP 453, PP 395)

An absolute truth would be one without pre-suppositions, or what comes to the same thing, one for which we could fully account. To truly ground that truth, one would have to account for one's accounting for that truth ad infinitum. "As Descarted said, it is both true that certain ideas present themselves to me with an irresistible evidence in fact, and that that fact never has the value of in principle (de droit), it does not suppress the possibility of doubting when we are no longer in presence of the idea." (PP 454, PP 397) To have a truth, to have an evidence, one must stop giving an account and take up a position resting on the evidence. But such evidences, Merleau-Ponty contends, are not irrevocable, for perhaps this Euclidean space, this society are not the only ones possible. (PP 453, PP 396) To be assured of a truth it is not necessary or possible to make it wholly explicit. (PP 455, PP 398)

All certitudes, Merleau-Ponty contends, are personal certitudes founded on the actual. Thus, it is not because I think I doubt that I am certain of doubting, or because I think I am that I am certain of my existence; but on the contrary, the certitude of my doubt and of my existence derive

from my actual doubting, from my actual existence. Perhaps this can be brought out by following Descartes' Second Meditation. Recalling Descartes, I reach the conclusion that because I think, I am. In so doing I am seizing my existence explicitly in language. It would be possible to ask myself even at that moment "what does 'I' mean?" Descartes does do so and ends up concluding that he is a thinking thing. But to consider this a more radical truth or reflection would be to miss Descartes' point. A more radical reflection would have had as the next step before the last, not so much "cogito, sum" as "cogitatur, est.,"[6] or rather something that cannot be expressed without turning it into what it is not. It might be called the silent cogito, the I accompanying all our consciousness. For example when I use language to speak the world I know that I am speaking and what I am saying, not as if I stood back to see what it is I am saying, but because in speaking I am knowing. The cogito is not behind the utterance. I cannot stand back from my saying something while I am saying it to know what I am saying. Nor do I need to do so. And yet, in knowing what I say I know that I know it while I am saying it.

Perception requires this silent cogito as much as any knowing does. I must know that I am seeing when I see, in the sense that my seeing is not a mere processus en troisieme personne, a function like digestion or respiration, which requires no intentionality. (PP 463, PP 405) When I see, I do

not have to know explicitly that I am seeing, as if my seeing were the thought of seeing.

The same holds true, according to Merleau-Ponty of the utterance. I know what I am saying when I say it, and I have a hold upon the world through the parole parlante. And though it remains the case that I cannot speak the world save in some language, I am not the lackey of the present possibilities of any particular language, for language can be as variously nuanced as the way I can live the world and bring it to expression. Though language envelops my thought so completely that it is my thought, I am not required to believe that I am led around by it, as the determinist must grant that he is, or as some theologians have contended that I am led around by the eternal decrees of God.[7]

For Merleau-Ponty the first logisizing of the world by the anonymous layer of the corps propre is perception, and it is from perception that the reflective, restructuring act creates the stable world of contingent truths. The genial restructuring of a viable new truth is akin to the crystallization of the political situation by a man of action--the "significant individual" Hegel spoke of in the Phenomenology of the Spirit. The world lies in wait, so to speak, for the man of genius; it is pregnant with its future (in suspense as Marx saw in his own way), but it takes the crystal of genius to make the future grow. Like perception, our truths remain creative acts. And just as the validity of our perception is

established by its consistency through numerous profiles, so the validity of our truths is established by their capacity to be related consistently to all our experiences and those of others, by their resistance to modifications on ever widening dimensions and without contradiction within such dimensions. The truth is the utterance which is offered as being capable in principle of being valid for any man. But this rationality and this truth grow out of and remain embedded in existential knowing which like that of rationality, is a contingent fact. The problem of rationality for Merleau-Ponty seems to be the problem of finding, if possible, the canonical certitudes (those to which all can assent), which are elaborated out of existential certitudes (the convictions to which individuals do assent).

Truth is like a classic, he says, an expression which can always be taken up again in a significant manner; an error is like a fad, the instant success which as quickly dies, or like a hallucination which was taken for a fact.

The future cannot now be rooted, as if we had a god's-eye-view; it can only in retrospect be seen to have been rooted. It is only a crude misunderstanding of this notion of truth as <u>praxis</u> which would falsify the exigencies of the paradox with such slogans as "does it work?" for this can be made into "can it be made to work," which is a principle of violence.[8] It is like a vulgar misunderstanding of Machiavelli which would justify anything in the name of the personal

interests of those in power, or in the name of an abstract state. Merleau-Ponty's conception of truth is a pragmatic one, but it would be an error to interpret it as a principle of exploitation.

It may be said, then, that for Merleau-Ponty the speaking man is literally the incarnation of reason, the flesh made word, the empirical bearer of the logos. It may be said that for him man is the measure of all meaning, but the opposite is also true, for man as measure is always being remade through his communion with the world and with others. If man were a definite entity with positive and defined attributes, and was not primarily an entity with an indefinite capacity for perceiving and expressing, his language and truth would be definite and determinate. "Mankind stands alone here with his freedom and his responsibility."[9]

Merleau-Ponty has lent some of his best efforts to the attempt to show that an illusory abstract reason obscures living reason and creates the notion of a finality that ill befits homo viator. Human reason is a militant reason, not a reason triumphant.

Footnotes for chapter seven

1. Cf. Aquinas, St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, Q 16, art. 2 and 3.

2. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes p. 118. I have modified the English translation in Signs, p. 94.

3. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes p. 121, Signs, p. 97.

4. The Aristotelian tradition does not say that one can have science (episteme) of the particular. It identifies the essence with the substance, which are the thing in quantum known and the same thing in se, (en soi) respectively.

5. Cf. Husserl, E., Formale und transzendentale Logik, p. 221. Quoted by Merleau-Ponty (PP 453, PP 395)

6. Merleau-Ponty says "on pense, on est." In English this would be something like "thinking is going on, there is someone."

7. It remains the case that I learn the meanings of words as I learn how to use a tool, seeing how it is used in the context of a certain situation. (PP 462, PP 403)

8. Merleau-Ponty, M., Signes, p. 120, Signs, p. 96.

9. Strasser, S., Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man. p. 259.

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I would like to point out some ways in which it seems to me that the doctrine of the corps propre runs parallel to and is in basic agreement with, an existential metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty's achievement will then appear to be of interest and significance to those concerned with the most daring questions that have arisen in the philosophia perennis.

Existential Metaphysics and the Real Distinction between Esse and Essence.

Without attempting to justify an existential metaphysics or to attribute it to any celebrated author, I will simply define it and then sketch it in broad outline.[1] An existential metaphysics is one which recognizes the ultimate reducibility of essence to existence. The meaning of existence (or of esse as I will say from now on) is clarified somewhat by saying that it is the act of existing (actus essendi).

We can bring out the meaning of these assertions by using some of Aquinas' formulations, without concerning ourselves directly with asserting or denying that Aquinas held this form of existential metaphysics. According to the great Dominican, only God can be said to be in an unqualified sense. Using what seems to be the inappropriate terminology of an essentialistic metaphysics, which he was

in the process of modifying in a profound way, Aquinas says that this means that God's essence is Ipsum Esse. I say that the expression is "inappropriate" because some of his own statements are to the effect that every contingent essence is its esse. He says for example, "Unumquodque quantum habet de esse, tantum habet de cogniscibilitate." [2] This is surprising, for if he were in full agreement with his contemporary Aristotelians this sentence should read, "Unumquodque quantum habet de essentia, tantum habet de cogniscibilitate." Aquinas also says that the esse of an essence is an esse of reason and that is why it is not nothing,[3] whereas for the other Aristotelians the esse of an essence was not nothing because it was possible. Aquinas' assertions here imply that essence is simply esse in quantum intelligible.

Now, it is clear that Aquinas does maintain a real distinction (ex parte rei) between essence and esse in contingent beings. He attributes ontological composition to all that is not Ipsum Esse Subsistens. But what is the meaning of the real distinction between essence and esse? How can he maintain both that essence is esse in quantum intelligible, and that esse in creatures is really distinct from their essence? If contingent essence were not ultimately reducible to a mode of esse, then essence of itself would have to be really distinct from esse in the sense of having some "attenuated" form of esse. Such a conception would in effect readopt Avicenna's notion of the possibles, which are but do not have

esse. Apparently for Aquinas the doctrine of the primacy of esse had not been fully grasped as implying the ultimate reducibility of essence to a mode of esse in contingent beings.

It should be remarked that an existential metaphysics, which asserts the ultimate reducibility of essence to a mode of esse in contingent beings, does not thereby assert that the essence of contingent existents is identified simpliciter with their esse. The essence of contingent existents is really other than their esse precisely because their essence is a limitation of esse. An existential metaphysics does not jeopardize what is of crucial importance to the Scholastics, namely, that in one Being alone is essence also esse without qualification. God's essence is esse tout court, but in contingent beings, essence is the limitation of esse. The ratio propter quod creatures are distinguished from God is not that God is simple (the One) and creatures are composite, but that the esse of creatures is limited, whereas that of God is not.

Further clarification of the new metaphysics that began under Aquinas may be supplied by contrasting his position with that of Giles of Rome. Much of the discussion regarding the real distinction between essence and esse focuses upon the difficulty of giving philosophical intelligibility to the Christian doctrine of the creatio ex nihilo. For Giles of Rome the question becomes, "Does God produce the esse of contingent beings (for every agent acts according to its nature and God's nature is Ipsum Esse), and is the diversity of creatures due

in some way to the fact that *esse* is received into limiting natures?" Giles' doctrine is perplexing. Not only does it seem to involve an impossible notion of essences (natures), which are but do not have *esse*, but it also seems to be "theologically false," *i.e.*, it attributes being to creatures free of the creative power.[4]

There is another form of the problem to be sure. Are not essences eternal, must they not have at least some reality prior to concrete actualization? Must they not have at least the reality of being possible, which is not the same as absolute non-being? The Platonic doctrine of the Forms supplied Augustine and the Scholastics with a model for conceiving the possibles as intelligible aspects of the Divine essence.[5] But is this anything more than an analogy of what the artist does with *available materials*?

A consistent metaphysics of *esse* would conceive the "Exemplars" as nothing but the fact that *Ipsum Esse* can be participated in by creatures and there need not be a Divine Idea for man, for eagle, for rat, etc. It is true that one may wonder whether this is not merely another way of saying that the possibles are intelligible aspects (exemplars) of the Divine essence communicable *ad extra*. But one may also wonder on what grounds only substances and laws are given the privilege of having examplars. Every *particular* action down to the level of Planck's constant was also possible before it occurred and has intelligibility. The notion of the Divine exemplars if carried to its ultimate conclusions would be tantamount to say-

saying that everything had already occurred,[6] or at least it would be indistinguishable from saying that the examplars are nothing but the fact that Ipsum Esse can be participated in, in an indefinite number of ways.

Considerations such as these have lead some authors to conclude that Giles' real concern in distinguishing esse from essence in creatures is to solve the problem of the One and the many, though he thought he was giving philosophical intelligibility to the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. God alone is simple and his creative act is purely to communicate esse. Diversity arises from natures even in the first act of creation. Every creature is a composite in some way or another, and this for him is the ultimate ratio for the distinction between God and creatures.

Giles is using the term "esse," but the form of the problem is essentially Platonic. God for Giles is still Ipsum Esse, however, and not the first emanation as in some Neo-Platonic doctrines.

Aquinas emphatically differs from Giles. He attributes not only the production of being, but of differences in being to God.[7] However, it is Giles' doctrine of creation and being, of the real distinction between essence and esse, which set the guide lines for all later discussions of these topics by the Scholastics. In this way a metaphysics of unity, or more precisely an essentialistic metaphysics, disguised as an

existential metaphysics controlled the formulations of the problems and solutions of the relations between essence and *esse*.[8]

The Significance of the Real Distinction between Essence and Esse in Cosmology.

Real ontological composition in substantial unity is the cosmological counterpart of the real distinction between essence and *esse*, and of its generalized form--act and potency.[9] The difficulty involved in trying to make sense of the contention that essence is that which limits *esse*, despite the fact that essence of itself is only possibility (has no *esse*), arises again in the doctrine of matter and form.

The doctrine of prime matter and substantial form was Aristotle's way of attempting to give intelligibility to radical change--from being non-animate to being animate, for example. There had to be some continuity between the first *tode ti*, and the ensuing *tode ti* even in a change of this kind. There had to be some principle of being that remained, so to speak, otherwise the new being would be new *simpliciter*, which would make substantial change unintelligible. But has the doctrine of prime matter and substantial form really enlightened us? First of all where does the new form come from? The traditional answer is that it is educed from the potentiality of prime matter, meaning that prime matter contained the new form in *potentia* and leaving the *novelty* of the

ensuing tode ti unexplained. Moreoever, the attempt to understand prime matter itself is futile. Materia prima is pure potency of itself, wholly indeterminate, formless. And yet it contains in some way the ingredients for the succeeding tode ti, otherwise one could not say that the form had been educed from it. Further, it combines with form and is even the material cause of form, causae sunt invicem causae.

The difficulty of understanding prime matter is even more accentuated for Aquinas, because he has in fact begun to break with the more traditional manner of conceiving the real distinction between esse and essence, matter and form, body and soul. He has numerous conflicting statements, such as , ". . . id quod participat esse oportet esse non ens. . . materia est hujusmodi."[10] But he also says, ". . . quod quamvis materia prima sit informis tamen inest ei imitatio primae formae; quantumcumque enim debile esse habeat."[11] (Italics mine)

It seems that a metaphysics of esse, a metaphysics in which essence is ultimately reducible to a mode of esse, could make better sense of the notion of prime matter and substantial form, and correspondingly of the notions of body and soul , as we shall try to indicate in schematic form later on.[12]

Epistemology in a Metaphysics of Esse

If now we turn to epistemology, I think it will be seen that au fond an essentialistic metaphysics arises out of a theory of knowledge which is an excellent scientific tool, but is misleading when applied to metaphysics. An essentialistic

epistemology stresses that science can be had only of the universal, not of the particular. This is intended to convey the idea that though the particular can be known it cannot be known exhaustively. However, it turns out to mean also that the individual cannot be known directly but only inferentially. Thus in trying to determine the most proper sense in which things can be said to be, Aristotle finally settles on the final actuality or essence, which is isomorphic with the ousia or substance. Accidents are derivative in the sense that they are not quite properly beings, but beings of beings. The rather strange consequence which Aristotle does not draw out explicitly is that one can only think the substance, one cannot see it. What can properly be said to be becomes an inferred entity. Yet we can have certitude about it, and only opinion about, or perception of individuals.

A metaphysics of esse seems to require an epistemology which basically modifies both the notion of perceiving and that of knowing. To perceive and even to know is first of all and always someone's experience, an experience of an individual involved with the world on a level of meaning prior to what may appropriately be called an intellectual understanding or awareness. What one sees is precisely the particular in a field of meaning. To see, for a man, is to experience particulars cognitively but pre-articulately in the mode of vision, to imagine is primarily to experience particulars cognitively but pre-articulately in the mode of reproductive phantasy, and to think

is to experience the general understandingly and articulately, i.e., in the mode of verbal discourse.

The superiority of experiencing understandingly in the mode of discourse is only relative. For certain purposes it is necessary, as in physics, biology, and above all in philosophy. Abstraction is not a question of isolating similarities but of attending to or zeroing in on certain modes of the particular esse. The most significant or distingushing mode of anything is what Aristotle called essence. A universal is an experience of a special mode of esse in a particular, or particulars, which has the characteristic that it is similar to another experience of another particular or other particulars which also manifest that special mode distinguishing them from other particulars which do not manifest it. To know a thing or event is not to grasp the essential species of that thing or event, as if the species were "what the thing or event is" but to experience the general in the particular, though the particular precisely does not possess or exemplify the general in its purity.

Incidentally it may well be wondered just how many, if any, modes of esse belong to all individuals we call men and distinguish them from other types of esse. Perhaps the only mode of esse which is common to all men is intentionality and a type of gene pool. The difficulty is conspicuous when we try to apply the Aristotelian definition of man to infants and embryos. It is only the strictures of an essentialistic metaphysics which requires us to say that the child is a man in so far as

he will naturally develop into a rational being. Who is to say that there is not a greater difference between an accomplished genius and a bumpkin, than there is between a bumpkin and a chimpanzee? The essences of an essentialistic metaphysics have their place in an existential metaphysics as specially significant modes of *esse* attributable to particulars. What is called essence in Aristotle is merely a specially significant invariant aspect of *esse*, predicable of many individual instances such that if a particular does not possess that aspect it is not that type of *esse*.

In an existential epistemology both knowledge and perception would be instances of experience in which a particular existent has been dis-closed according to one of its modes. Perception and everyday practical knowing would be the dis-covering of various *prima facie* modes of particular *esses*. Scientific knowing would be an experience of disclosure of particularly significant modes of *esse* according to a systematic method of disclosing the general in the particular. I should perhaps stress that the significance of a mode of *esse* can change for different purposes of the particular knowers. For technological control and prediction the most significant mode of *esse* would perhaps be mass and acceleration.

Particularly existents or *esses* are as it were, the complete text from which all knowers read. To see or to know is to acknowledge a particular *esse* in a special or in various modes of disclousre. And since there are uncountable ways in which the

particular *esses* can be disclosed, but even more ways in which one can experience disclosure of the same *esses*, some experiences can be errors. Others can be magnificent coherent deformations, such as poetry or art. But great art can heighten the experience of what was previously seen as a prose of the world, thus throwing into relief the importance of a particular *esse* or a mode of disclosure. In this sense art can be more discerning and even truer than science.

The Problem of Change in an Existential Metaphysics.

The use of the matter-form schema to explain change seems to leave the question of where the form comes from in obscurity. To say that it is educed from the potentiality of matter means that the form was contained there in some way. Thus our understanding of change does not seem to have been furthered, for we must conceive of prime matter as the stuff out of which the succeeding form emerges, and that the newness is precisely the fact that this stuff now exists in a way that it did not before. The analogies used by Aristotle to illustrate his cosmological principles are taken from instances in which the newness is nothing more than re-arrangement. For example, bronze was "formless" relative to the bronze statue, but remains constitutive of the statue. It may be wondered whether the analogy is the only thing that we understand and whether the terms of the analogy transposed into cosmological principles are expressions

whose genuine referents are those of the analogy.

It seems that in an essentialistic metaphysics and cosmology the composition in the existent is, despite claims to the contrary, a real composition in which there is a relation of factor to factor resulting in a kind of tension and shifting from real unity to real duality in the particular existent. The binominal formula is inherent to an essentialistic cosmology and is built into the basic structure of at least the Standard Average European languages. It is admirably suited to speaking of objects, but ill suited to speaking of activity. It sounds natural to say that a body is alive or even lives, but it would sound strange to say that life is going on there where there is also a physical configuration. To speak of change and activity in essentialistic speech requires the matter-form distinction.

We have said that in an existential metaphysics essence is ultimately reducible to a mode of *esse*, *i.e.*, to a *way* in which *esse* is. This implies that essence in contingent beings is not so much really distinct from, as other than its *esse*, for it is the way (limited) that *esse* is. In a cosmology based on the conception that essence is ultimately reducible to a mode of *esse*, not only is the strange doctrine of the possibles which are but do not exist disposed of; but the notion of prime matter, which is pure potency, is realized to be an offshoot and dead wood of an essentialistic ontology. Prime matter is merely the

name for the fact that a particular *esse* does not possess more esse, and for the fact that what is now *esse* A can be considered as able to become *esse* B. Prime matter is a general designation of a *positive esse*, (say an amino acid) which does not have a *superior positive esse* (say protein) and can be considered as capable of becoming ingredient in a new *esse* (protein).

The notion of prime matter modified by a metaphysics of *esse* does not entail the conclusion that the *esse* of say a man is matter *in quantum* capable of becoming cadaver. A more adequate definition of prime matter might be rather than "*esse in quantum* able to become other *esse*," something like, "*esse in quantum* able to become *superior esse*." The priority of act to potency is actually a priority of the importance of the grades of modes of *esse*. On the purely ontological level (disregarding axiology of any sort) the human *esse* would be potential fuel for a furnace.[13]

An existential cosmology which would effectively abandon the notion of ontological and cosmological composition would, it seems, have to conceive *esse* as plastic, as the stuff of the cosmos. This would not seem to be far removed from the notion of a primordial stuff which by rearrangement accounts for all novelty. It would have this crucial difference from a materialistic atomism and from the doctrine of prime matter, however; *esse* need not be primordial in the sense of primitive or formless. Any *esse*, say a man, *in quantum* possessing a mode of *esse* common

to man and beef-on-the-hoof is still an animal; *in quantum* still possessing the modes of *esse* common to man and dressed beef is still chemical; *in quantum* still possessing the modes of *esse* common to man and stones (*e.g.*, weight) is still "physical." Inversely, when the *esse* which is a man acquires modes of *esse* which traditional theology has attributed to God *formaliter* (knowledge, goodness, power, etc.) he is a spirit.

Perhaps an existential cosmology would have to be a cosmology of process. The emergence of newness would be the gradual unfolding of *esse* which in its very unfolding manifests novelty. Some novelty discloses itself to us at times as a quantum jump, so to speak, for example when water abruptly becomes steam, when ingested food manifests itself subsequently as comportment. This conception does not deny radical change of *esse*, but asserts nothing but changing *esse*.[14] Perhaps an existential cosmology would have to say, paraphrasing Plato, that anything which possesses any sort of power to affect another, or to be affected by another, even for a moment, however trifling the cause and however slight the effect has real *esse*. The definition of *esse* would be simply power.[15]

Now, each particular *esse* manifests itself according to the way it is, and not merely according to the way it was before. *Esse* is through and through analogical--each *esse* has *esse suo modo*. To state it somewhat crudely, the *esse* of man is a novel configuartion of previous *esse*, but he is not *merely* a novel configuration of previous *esse* (as if the novelty were derivative

and the previous *esse* primary and alone real) as if man were epiphenomenal with respect to what *really is*. There is only *dynamis*, but *dynamis* of different kinds.

Finally, change takes place according to law. However, there is conspicuous evidence in our experience of freedom and in our observation of meaning-giving action that there are different laws for conspicuously differing kinds of *esse*. Furthermore, even the most general laws of "physical" *esse* may be those of a current cosmological epoch.

It is appropriate to remark here in passing that to say that law itself is a fortuitous result of randomness is meaningless. The fact of the matter is that "probabilities" average out, and that is what is not explained by randomness. This does not commit us to saying that the modes of disclosure of *esse* which we call laws (*quoad nos*) are *the* laws (*quoad se*). But it does commit us to saying that there is order *quoad se*. One may choose to refrain from speaking of the lawfulness of *esse quoad se* (and this is legitimate for science) but a further quest for intelligibility would still require an explanation of the harmony (order) of experience, as well as why there is some sort of fit of our experience to the world *in se*, *i.e.*, some sort of order between us and the *en soi*. To attribute both forms of order to an *a priori* leaves two questions unanswered: (a) What is the source of the *a priori*? (b) By what miracle does the *a priori* fit matters of fact *quoad se*? Even if the *a priori* were a kind of coherent deformation, it is coherent,

and it seems impossible to imagine how it would fit the matters of fact unless they were coherent (even if we admit that the two coherences are not the same).

This forces us back into admitting what most metaphysicians have concluded, namely, that standard, value and law exist *in se*, and that the cosmos in itself is what its name conveys, an ordered totality.

Moreoever, the fact that there is *esse* at all does not account for itself, and we may be forced to conclude that there is *esse a se* in something like the traditional sense. What is probably most difficult to understand is how all contingent *esse* is not *esse a se* manifested in limited modes as it seems Spinoza held, and that *esse a se* is wholly immanent to the cosmos. On the other hand, no amount of limited *esse* is the same as *esse a se*, and there is reason to assert that there is Unlimited *Esse* which is also transcendent. It is this *Esse* that some men have called and still call God.

Merleau-Ponty and Existential Metaphysics.

Now what is the relevance of all this to what I have expressed in this dissertation? Particularly what is the relevance of the doctrine of the corps propre to an existential metaphysics?

As we have seen, an essentialistic metaphysics (which corresponds *grosso modo* to an epistemology which is guilty of making common cause with the *prejugé du monde*), claims that

there is a most proper way in which things can be said to be and that others are derivative. Stated ontologically this means that any *esse* which is not *esse* in the most proper sense is only a being of a being, *e.g.*, an accident, appearance, epiphenomenon, etc. Essentialism can thereby claim the possibility of univocal statements about matters of fact and deny that one entity can also be two types of entity. In its most extreme form perhaps, it would assert that Scott and the author of Waverly are identical and that is all there is to it.[16] Similarly, a man is either a body or not a body and that is all there is to it. But what if that is, after all, the way things are? Perhaps that is the way things have to be for an essentialistic ontology based on an essentialistic epistemology.

In an existential ontology one would have to remember that when one speaks of *the* essence, he is speaking of the distinguishing mode of *esse*. In a man this would be his rationality, if you like, but it is not an ontological principle (soul) distinct from his corporeality, though it is other than his corporeality. Just as the meaning of Scott is different from the meaning of the author of Waverly, though both are the same man; so the mode of *esse* disclosed as a physical ensemble (body) is different from the mode of esse disclosed as intentionality (spirit), but both are the same *esse*. This does not mean that body is spirit, or that spirit is body, but that the *esse* which is man is both at the same time. Scott is the author of Waverly, but that is *not* all there is to it. Scott is also the man who

walked in the hills of a certain country at a certain time, etc., etc. A man is no more a dual compound of body and spirit than he is an indefinite multiplicity of all his properties, rather he is a single *esse* manifesting many modes.

Has this discussion been a mountain that gives birth to a mouse? Does it conclude simply that there are particular *esses* and that each can be experienced according to countless modes? Is this not perhaps trivially true and inconsequential towards understanding how body and mind can be constitutive of one *esse*? Perhaps not, for the substitutivity of equireferential terms (a and b said of the same x) does not imply that these terms have the same meaning. Mind does not mean body, body does not mean mind. Yet anything attributed to *this esse* (*e.g.*, mind to a man) does refer *suo modo* to what *quoad se* is a mode of a single *esse*. Perhaps an essentialistic metaphysics cannot make sense of reference except in an ontology destitute of complexity, whereas an existential metaphysics can.

Perhaps this can be clarified somewhat by recalling an earlier portion of this thesis. Merleau-Ponty used the analogy of the Sacrament to illustrate what perception is. We commune with the world in proportion as we are prepared inwarly to receive it. This stresses the subjective conditions and tends to forget entirely about the non-subjective ones. If Merleau-Ponty had adhered to his own analogy more closely he might have pointed out that the Sacrament produces its effect *ex opere*

operato, as well as ex opere operantis. And had he applied the analogy completely to his own doctrine of perception he would not have spoken almost exclusively of the resistance and opacity of perception. He would have spoken more of the being that "solicits" perception, as he in fact began to do in his last unfinished work. It was quite clear to him right along, of course, that it is because of something ex parte rei in se that there is both resistance and opacity, as well as because of the limitations ex parte subjecti.

Sometimes he speaks as if he would adopt unqualifiedly the principle that esse est percipi, whereas he means by that what is little more than trivially true to those who have thought about it, namely that nothing can be an object unless it is for a subject, for the very meaning of object is "that which is for subjectivity." What is not so trivial is that the object is not my experience qua tale, but the real presence of the thing.[18] Merleau-Ponty's hard-headedness on this question has its rationale and is crucial, for to avoid the préjugé du monde, it is vital to remember that nothing is disclosed except to subjectivity. This means that the objects of awareness are not the things-in-themselves nor appearances, but the things themselves, i.e., the presence of what we have called a mode of disclosure.

An examination of SC shows that he accepts uncritically the notion of "real" from the Cartesian tradition. On such a view there are two senses of the real or of being, i.e., res extensa and res cogitans. That is the main reason, I submit, why

Merleau-Ponty advocates the abandonment of "realistic" thinking in psychology. The philosophical concern which prompted the notion of structure was an attempt to free the study of comportment from the strictures of a narrowly conceived scientific method, as a means to understanding the relations of consciousness to nature. But perhaps unknown to himself the philosophical exigency which prompted the notion of "structure" was a search for a notion of being as conceived by an existential metaphysics. It may have been Merleau-Ponty's insight that attributing real ontological composition to man forces a return to some sort of dualism (or some sort of monism), that was behind his quest for a philosophy of "structure." In the Phenomenology of Perception he is more aware that his notion of structure applied to the human body was an ontological position. The concern with ontology becomes dominant in Le Visible et l'Invisible.

However, the doctrine of the corps propre even as it stands in the Phenomenology of Perception in effect seems to carry forward a metaphysics of esse applied to the human existent. This is particularly clear in his philosophy of the parole parlante.

In chapter seven we have seen how Merleau-Ponty argues that neither empiricism not intellectualism give an account of how the word itself means. For the empiricist "brain traces" or associations cause the word, but the word itself does not denominate. (PP 204, PP 174) For the intellectualist, the real

act of denomination is the thought, and the external word is an accompaniment, "the external sign of an internal recognition." (PP 206, PP 176) On the latter view, it is the thought which means and the word is its vehicle. But for neither the empiricst nor the intellectualist does the word itself mean.

If the word does mean, then when a person speaks, his "physical articulation" (involving muscles and brain pulses) does not "run parallel" to his thought or consciousness, but rather his speech is indivisibly one and the other. The justification for distinguishing thought and word in the speaking person is that a movement of muscles and brain pulses are one aspect of a single esse which is also meaning-giving action and consciousness. "It cannot be said of speech either that it is an operation of intelligence or that it is a motor phenomenon; it is wholly motility and wholly intelligence." (PP 227, PP 194) In a word, it is the corps propre which speaks and not the mind through the body, or the body qua physical ensemble.

The difficulty that both empiricism and intellectualism have in allowing that the word itself means, is attributed by Merleau-Ponty to the préjugé du monde of which both are equally guilty. Both seem to insist that there is no alternative description of the same event or matter of fact, in the case in point, that the same esse cannot be both mind and matter.

For Merleau-Ponty as we have seen, when I perceive your words I perceive your thought (not your secret ones, but the

ones you express). The *esse* of your speech *qua* corporeal has only the most tenuous effects on my timpanic membranes, but the *esse* of your speech *qua* intentional may have enormous efficacy upon my *esse qua* understanding. Both Aristotle and Aquinas frequently express very much the same idea. But the element of essentialism which clung to their formulations betrays itself when they speak of the body *and* the soul, when they speak of the individual as a composite, and when they allow for interaction between the "factors" or "principles of being" of the composite.

The doctrine of the corps propre also carries forward an epistemology consonant with a metaphysics of *esse*. To know is not to grasp the *species* as if it were "what the thing really is," but to acknowledge the general in the particular. To acknowledge an *esse*, say a man, under the particular aspect of corporeality is to uncover one of his modes of *esse*; to acknowledge that same man under the aspect of meaning-giving acts is to uncover another mode of his *esse*.

In a sense knowledge is intrinsically analogical and one might say metaphorical, for not only does each *esse* possess its modes *suo modo*, but knowledge of these modes is only a partial knowledge of the *esse*. What is acknowledged stands for the whole *esse*, it is a kind of *pars pro toto* or synecdoche. All knowledge and experience has some truth, but none is *the truth*.

It could be said that Merleau-Ponty rejoins Cassirer for whom all knowing is a symbolic form. However, he does not

make Cassirer's final move and attribute "essential" knowledge (as the Scholastics say) only to the so called "scientific" symbolic forms.

More properly Merleau-Ponty rejoins Plato. For just as the dream says something in figure as does the myth, so too perception and all forms of knowledge reveal something in part of real _esse_. Our knowledge would then be more a kind of _mythos_ than a kind of _logos_, a groping in the dark and not pure vision.

This would seem to imply that the corps propre is not only a being who cannot help doing metaphysics, but is one who does it by right however poorly. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy certainly runs on into ontology, if it ever left it. And though it would be impossible to guess what the full scope of his ontology might have been--we may not hope to tame the sphinx[19] (of being)-- yet he has helped to show that efforts to tease some worthwhile answers from it are not in vain.

Footnotes to Conclusion

1. I am indepted to William Carlo's book The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics, for certain expressions I use in this chapter and for the quotatinns from Aquinas.

2. Thomas Aquinas, Contra Gentiles, I, 71. Cf. also Idem II, 52 for what seems to be the contrary of this.

3. Thomas Aquinas, I Sent., 19, q. 5 al ad 7.

4. To illustrate how God gives esse to essences, Giles uses the analogy of the sea which fills any vessel immersed in it.

5. A recent formulation of the same problem was developed by Whitehead in his doctrine of "eternal objects." Whitehead is more willing than Plato to conceive these possibles as an indefinite multiplicity. Plato at least hesitated to assert that there is a Form for the shuttle. Whitehead is more consistent. Cf. Whitehead, A.N., Science and the Modern World, chapters 9 and 10.

6. One of Merleau-Ponty's main objections to the traditional notion of God is that if there were such a God there would be no history, but an eternal return of the same.

7. Thomas Aquinas, De Potentia, Q II, a 16, ad 4; idem, resp.

8. Cf. William Carlo, op.cit., p. 86.

9. Historically the act and potency distinction was first used in a systematic way by Aristotle to attempt to make change and motion intelligible against the arguments of the great Eleatics.

10. Thomas Aquinas, De Sub., sept. c. VI pp. 150-151

11. Idem, De Veritate, q. 3, a.1 ad 1.

12. Cf. The Problem of Change in an Existential Metaphysics p. 170 infra.

13. Incidentally, Aquinas seems to express precisely such a view when he says, "Sicut autem omne quod est in potentia potest dici materia, ita omne a quo aliquid habet esse, sive substantiale, sive accidentale potest dici forma." De. Princ. Nat., I. It also agrees with Merleau-Ponty's statement in SC that each "structure" can be considered matter with respect to a higher grade of "structure."

14. For the Greek mind and even for most of us today, the apparent quantum leap character of some change gives rise to the ontological categories which have been traditionally called "essential." This is *au fond* a static notion, a classification of *esse*. It seems that it is the perspective which founds the cosmological category. This does not imply that an existential metaphysics would deny that there are "essential" differences, but merely that no single perspective is *the* real one.

15. *Cf*. Plato, *Sophist*, Jowett's translation, p. 247.

16. *Cf*. Wilson, N.L., "Modality and Identity," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXII (1965) p. 473. Also the contrary view by Ignacio Angelleli, "Indiscernability (substitutivity) of Identicals as a Fallacy of Accident," staff colloquy paper delivered at Texas University, Feb. 24, 1967.

17. For a linguistic analysis which has some striking parallels to the position outlined here, *cf*., Aldrich, Virgil C., *An Aspect Theory of Mind*. (Esp. p. 16 of unpublished paper)

18. We would not even speak of hallucination or illusion unless we set it against real presence.

19. Merleau-Ponty, M., *Signes*, p. 200, *Signs*, p. 158.

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